



## Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc.

### Council Mergers – Expensive backflip to the status quo

**Port Stephens, Dungog and Newcastle Council Merger Proposals have been abandoned by the NSW Government.**

- Notable by their absence, Premier Mike Baird, Deputy Troy Grant and Local Govt. Minister Toole have wasted an opportunity for much needed Local Government reform with their ambitious attempt to merge multiple NSW Councils, which Local State Member Kate Washington referred to as a “a dogs breakfast.” None of them have survived the backlash.
- Now the new Premier, Gladys Berejicklian has had to try and clean this up by abandoning the process before three impending by elections become a repeat of their recent electoral disaster at Orange. She had to clear the decks but it could be a risky move to have one set of rules for the city and have different ones for the bush. This may present legal difficulties in future.
- As a result the ratepayers of Newcastle, Dungog and Port Stephens Councils have been disenfranchised by this decision. Their Councils will have their terms extended by a full year without facing the voters at an election.
- For the Councils that have already been amalgamated, the egg cannot be unscrambled. For the Councils that took it to court the costs have been astronomical and the matters may still not be resolved for some time. They will be in limbo.
- Our Council has blown over \$250K of their ratepayers funds on expensive consultants producing counter proposals, buses, sausage sizzles and boxing gloves, but has not achieved a different result to anyone else. The Council and staff have been in ‘Merger Mode’ for 14 months and unable to make proper decisions.
- At its meeting last night (14 Feb 2017) the Councillors went straight into ‘Election Mode’ for the run down to the next poll on 9 September this year. In a series of notices of motion they agreed to increase debit and borrow \$6m for large infrastructure projects that the next Council will have to pay off. We do not necessarily disagree with the borrowing at a time of record low interest rates, but what it gets spent on will be of great concern.

- Clr. Jordan freely admitted that they had cleaned out the Ward (read slush) Fund kitty in anticipation of a merger, “To make sure Newcastle did not get it” and would need to top it up by not just the \$30k proposed for the Mayor in his notice of motion, but by a further \$30k to be distributed to the Wards.....
- The next term will be a shorter 3 year one to re-synchronise the system, so it will be up to the incumbents who may wish to run again to demonstrate over the next 6 months that they are worthy of consideration, and the ratepayers need to decide if they want another council with a dominant voting bloc and more of the acrimonious Codes of Conduct etc. that were in evidence at last night’s meeting.

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