

Iftomerong Community Forum

PO Box 1100,
Tomerong NSW 2540

www.tomerong.com

email; tomerongforum@hotmail.com

Date; 22nd February 2016

Ref; Proposed Forced Shoalhaven/Kiama Council Merger

Mr. Greg Wright

The Delegate

Shoalhaven-Kiama Merger Proposal

GPO Box 5341

Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Mr Wright,

The Tomerong Community Forum have discussed the forced merger in detail and based on evidence available have voted to strenuously oppose the merger.

Our reasons for opposing the Forced Merger are;

- There has been no real community consultation despite State Governments press release [Minister's press release of 6/01/2016] which stated some four years of consultation with councils, feedback from communities etc. We have received no evidence of such consultation, and we are a recognised Community Consultative Body with Shoalhaven City Council.
- Shoalhaven City Council is part of the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Pilot Joint Organisation of Councils which resulted from the October 2013 Independent Local Government Review Panel Final Report which concluded that Shoalhaven would remain stand alone but become part of the joint organisation. [ref ILGRP Revitalising Local Government Report p110]
- Following on from that report and under Sec 33 of September 2014 Report council submitted its application in June 2015 to IPART and in October 2015 IPART concluded that Shoalhaven City Council was "**fit for the future**" and able to stand alone.
- Under the subsequent Fit for the Future process, both Kiama and Shoalhaven councils were repeatedly advised by Government officials that they were not required to consider a merger because the Independent Panel had not recommended one (meaning the councils satisfied "scale and capacity" benchmarks.
- As a result, neither Shoalhaven nor Kiama took the issue of a merger to their community for debate. It was simply not a consideration.

- Despite requests to State Government, there has been no inclusion in forced merger public documentation of what is the proposed outcome for Shoalhaven Water?? This is a \$1.2 B Infrastructure asset owned by the people of Shoalhaven and duly funded by same. It returns some\$ 7 M. a year to Shoalhaven Councils operating expenses. Shoalhaven will become financially unviable with the loss of this valuable asset and with the merger and the paltry sum State Govt proposed to inject into the proposed new council [5 million dollars] it is basically primary school mathematics the State Government is using that does not add up.
- The \$400,000 [approx] that State Government spent of taxpayer money in engaging KPMG to compile a report on the merger was a waste of taxpayer money as they used outdated figures and although they corrected some errors they are still using outdated figures. [Not 2014/2015 figures which show an annual saving of \$6.5m].
- Independent IRIS Research phone survey found that 71% of people contacted in the Shoalhaven were against the merger and 92% of people in Kiama were similarly against the merger. [Ref Illawarra Mercury 19/01/2016 Kiama, Shoalhaven survey 13-14/02/2016]
- Therefore, to claim that the proposal is based on *“consultation... independent assessment, council merger preferences, and feedback from communities and stakeholders”* is simply **false** and State Government would have a hard time proving otherwise if case arose.

Summation:

1. The Political “process” that State Government is forcing on the people of Shoalhaven and Kiama is not democratic as our elected State and Local government representatives can not truly represent the wishes of the majority of their constituents, as the recommendation of Mr. Greg Wright to Minister Paul Toole will be the basis of Governments decision making process.
2. Based on all the evidence above it is obvious that;
 - the expert Panel that reviewed the local government system found no justification for merging the two councils,
 - The independent body that assessed the councils found no better option than for them both to stand alone, and
 - The Government told the councils they didn’t need to consider a merger, so their communities were not consulted until after the process had ended, at which time the communities made their views clear - No.
- 3 **The Tomerong Community Forum does not support this merger.**

Regards

Peter Allison

Chairperson

Tomerong Community Forum