

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 6

**PUBLIC FORUM INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

At Sydney on Monday 10 August 2015

The Committee met at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. P. Green (Chair)

The Hon. L. Amato

The Hon. R. Borsak

The Hon. S. Cotsis

The Hon. C. E. Cusack

The Hon. B. C. Franklin

The Hon. P. T. Primrose

Mr D. M. Shoebridge

The Hon. E. K .C. Wong

JAYASOORIAH, having been affirmed: I am a resident of Randwick city speaking on behalf of myself and I am also the chair of my local precinct, which are both members of SOC. I thank the Committee for providing me with an opportunity to speak on my submission. Randwick City Council claims its survey of 6,000 residents shows that 51 per cent support amalgamation. My analysis of the same data shows that only 30 per cent support amalgamation.

Local Government NSW did a survey of 7,000 Sydney residents and found that 85 per cent supported a stand-alone option and that 61 per cent had their first preference as a stand-alone option. Hence, the support for amalgamation is between 15 and 39 per cent, according to their survey. Randwick council also claims, through a series of transformations, that its survey shows 46 per cent support its merger proposal. My analysis concludes only 3 per cent support the merger proposal. It is reasonable to infer that the truth is somewhere in between: 15 to 51 per cent support amalgamation and 3 to 46 per cent support the proposed merger.

It is my submission to this Committee that these results are simply not good enough. The range is far too broad to give any meaningful indication of community support, let alone make a decision on the future of Randwick city. In my submission I asked for the proposed merger not to be considered without a referendum of the residents in both Randwick and Waverley council areas. I wish to provide further evidence here to suggest that the process adopted by Randwick City Council in response to the FFTF agenda is fundamentally flawed.

On 23 September 2014, council passed a resolution and the salient points of it are that council unambiguously state that it is opposed to amalgamation; its councillors affirm that they are opposed to amalgamation now and after the 2016 local government election; council immediately notify residents, ratepayers, businesses, community groups, sporting clubs, surf life saving clubs and council staff that it does not support amalgamation; council fund a public awareness campaign opposing any amalgamation. This was a motion on notice and it was carried unanimously.

Council further resolved to adhere to a FFTF blueprint timetable and the key elements of the timetable are as follows. On 11 December 2014 it starts stages one and two of community consultation, which it did. On 2 March 2015 it is supposed to analyse the results and report to council, which it analysed and the report has been challenged by my submission No. 169. On 31 March 2015 it is supposed to conduct a councillors briefing session—it did not do that. On 7 April 2015 it is supposed to call for an extraordinary council meeting to jointly resolve with all councils in the grouping on a preferred option—it did not do that. On 8 April 2015 it is supposed to prepare the proposal as resolved—it did not do that. On 28 April 2015 it is supposed to resolve to place the draft proposal on public exhibition in accordance with the FFTF blueprint—it did not do that. May 2015 is when the proposal is supposed to be put up for 28 days—it did not do that. On 23 June 2015 it resolved to move a resolution to endorse the proposal—it did not do that too. On 30 June 2015 it is supposed to submit the proposal—it did that.

On 26 May 2015 council resolved on a motion pursuant to which the only deterministic outcome was a merger of Randwick and Waverley councils. This motion was not on notice; it was from the floor. Eight voted in favour, six against and one abstained. Council's submission to IPART pursuant to this motion is at odds with its own resolution in 2014. What triggered council to change its unambiguous position opposed to amalgamation? What happened to the affirmation by each and every councillor that they are opposed now and after the 2016 local government election to amalgamation? Why did council not fund the public awareness campaign opposing amalgamation and instead spend \$250,000 on a campaign in support of amalgamation? Why did council change its direction and when did this happen?

It would be unproductive to speculate as to why but I think it has to be looked into. The starting point could be the meeting of 29 September 2014 where it made the resolutions that I said earlier on and where the mayor at that time was Councillor Scott Nash. The end point could be the meeting of 26 May where they resolved in the opposite direction and it was a different mayor, Councillor Ted Seng. It is my opinion that the change in council's position occurred sometime between 29 September 2014 when the resolution was made to stand alone and 11 December 2014 when it embarked on stage one.