



MEDIA RELEASE

14 March 2017

O'DEA MP PUTS PARLIAMENTARY JOB AND POSITION BEFORE CONSTITUENTS ON AMALGAMATION ISSUE.

The Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment Inc. (FOKE) has expressed bitter disappointment about the standard letter sent by Jonathan O'Dea MP (Member for Davidson) to constituents who complained about the Premier's biased decision to force amalgamation of metropolitan councils. O'Dea is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and his letter was in part misleading. (See attached transcribed letter from O'Dea to resident).

"FOKE said the letter contains a number of misleading, and unqualified statements. Ratepayers and residents who have taken the time to write to the Premier and who are opposed to forced amalgamation deserve a full and transparent letter in reply," Kathy Cowley said.

O'Dea fails to justify the claim the benefits the Government claims amalgamation has delivered. Residents are referred to the website "Stronger Councils" which provides only general information and some to the "New Councils Progress Report".

The Progress Report fails:

- to mention the application of state government funds given to the 2 Councils of \$20 million to merge
- the cost of redundancies of council employees
- to mention any loss of services and the cost to the community
- to justify any improvement in services in comparison with what existed previously

"According to a resident The Report is merely a "puff piece" without any real evidence, in the same way as they did with the KPMG report in the Boundary Review Process", said Kathy Cowley.

"People will not sit back and accept government's reports based on misleading and unsubstantiated information. Amalgamation is not about driving efficiencies. It is about delivering excessive development at the expense of the community and our quality of life. It is about dictating planning outcomes and reducing the voice of the community", Kathy Cowley claimed.

“FOKE is bitterly disappointed in the behaviour of our two State MPs who have put their Liberal Party jobs ahead of the constituents they have been elected to represent. It explains why neither Jonathan O’Dea MP or Alister Henskens MP have ever come out publicly to support Ku-ring-gai Council’s strong stance against forced amalgamation despite all the correspondence they have received from constituents expressing their opposition to the forced merger. Hornsby Shire residents, on the other hand, have been silent or completely apathetic on the issue!” Kathy Cowley explained.

For media comment, please call Kathy Cowley on 0431 158 880 or 9416 9007

(Letter to resident re amalgamation 29 Feb 2017:

Dear

Thank you for your letter of 8 February 2017 regarding the NSW Government’s approach to council mergers. I am replying on behalf of the Premier and I have noted your comments.

On 14 February 2017, the Government announced that it would continue the process of merging councils in metropolitan Sydney and that, based on feedback from communities and the clear benefits already delivered, it remained committed to all existing mergers across the State.

Sydney will need to house more than 1.74 million new residents in the next 20 years. This means we need councils to consider housing development applications efficiently and have the funding required to provide essential services and local infrastructure. For this reason, the Government will proceed with the five outstanding merger proposals in Sydney.

We have listened to concerns about local character in Sydney and will continue to ensure individual wards of merged councils will have a say in strategic planning processes to ensure that local residents get an even stronger say in the planning of their neighbourhoods.

As you may be aware, regional councils have already undergone much more consolidation than the city has, with the number of regional councils falling from 133 to 111 in the past 15 years. By comparison in Sydney, most council boundaries had remained largely unchanged since the 1940s, with some boundaries unchanged for more than 100 years.

While there have been a number of significant improvements in merged regional councils, the Government has accepted that a one-size-fits-all model does not always apply outside Sydney. The financial benefits over the next 20 years in the new councils are also six times greater in the Sydney councils than those in regional areas.

For these reasons, the Government is not proceeding with any further mergers outside metropolitan Sydney. Elections for already merged councils and the ones that will not be merged will be held in September 2017. The 20 new councils already in place will continue to serve their communities and money will not be wasted on costly de-amalgamations. These new councils have already funded 848 new community projects and services.

More information can be found at <https://www.strongercouncils.nsw.gov.au/>.

While the Government understands our decision will remain unpopular with some, I hope this letter provides a clearer picture of why Government reached its decision. Thank you again for raising this important matter with the Government.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan O’Dea MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and Treasurer)