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Candidate for Lyne

CLEAN POLITICS AND
SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

MEDIA RELEASE 16 April 2016

Council amalgamations – Caring about democracy

Whilst I feel strongly that councils should remain local, be properly financed and respected by both state and federal governments, my deeper concern is that of improper and undemocratic process regarding the Baird government's forced council amalgamations.

During my terms as a Gloucester Shire councillor and Mayor, I was involved in the now decade-long discussions regarding constitutional recognition of Local Government. Long overdue and vulnerable to the political whims of successive federal governments, this important recognition would make sure that state and territory governments could not play fast and loose with grassroots democracy i.e., with your local council.

Letters were recently sent by Local Government Minister Toole, trying to push councillors to roll over on council amalgamations and reapply for their jobs. Councillors are elected by their local residents and ratepayers, not handpicked by the government of the day.

The Baird government enlisted consultants to conduct financial modelling on council amalgamations, then stamped all the documents 'Cabinet-in-confidence' to ensure that they can never be seen by the public. Do they even exist?

There are legal challenges by some councils concerning allegations that the government improperly using ss218A to 218F of the Local Government Act to force council amalgamations when those sections of the Act were intended only to facilitate voluntary amalgamations.

There is not a single report that supports the 'thought bubble' of a Gloucester/Dungog amalgamation (still on the table!), or the Greater Taree, Great Lakes and Gloucester Council proposal. Where are these consultant's reports???

Federal Constitutional Recognition of Local Government is a must and the Greens strongly support this important democratic reform. Keeping councils local and council jobs can mean the difference between keeping libraries, waste management, road safety and other essential services in local communities.

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