

# Supportive Submission for Pittwater Council response to Fit for the Future

## Purpose of Submission

This paper summarises “Pittwater Forever’s” submission with respect to Pittwater Council’s Fit for the Future Option 1 recommendation.

## Pittwater Forever

Pittwater Forever is a Federation of the major Pittwater Residency Associations. Pittwater Forever represents:

1. Avalon Preservation Association
2. Bayview Church Point Residents Association (BVCPPRA)
3. Bayview Ingleside Residents association
4. Bayview Life
5. Bilgola Preservation Society
6. Clareville & Bilgola Plateau Residents Association (CABPPRA)
7. Careel Bay Pittwater Protection Association Inc (CBPPA Inc)
8. Church Point Friends
9. Friends of Currawong
10. Mona Vale Residents Association
11. Newport Residents Association (NRA)
12. Palm Beach and Whale Beach Association (PBWBA)
13. Pittwater Community Arts
14. Pittwater Natural Heritage Association
15. Save Mona Vale Hospital
16. Warriewood Residents Association
17. West Pittwater Community Association
18. Avalon Historical Society

Pittwater Forever supports OPTION 1 (No Merger).

## Preamble

Pittwater seceded from Warringah Council in 1992 after a very lengthy struggle over many issues including poor service from a large and remote council, a significant backlog in infrastructure and inappropriate developments. Pittwater was the first local council to be formed by secession in 100 years. 73.5% of the residents voted in favour of secession.

The following list represents some of the **key issues** that the Pittwater Forever would like to see included in Pittwater Councils formal FFF response to the NSWG supporting Option 1. (No Merger) i.e. No return to the past.

## Pittwater Council is STRONG

- Council has been certified “FIT for the Future” by KPMG based on **all** the NSW Government criteria.
- Merging will not materially improve the financial position and will probably make it worse (see below).
- SHOROC (or similar structure) capitalises on any economies of scale in the region and its role has expanded to encompass advocacy and planning in Regional transport, health, environment etc. – all without amalgamation. Last financial year collaboration via SHOROC gained our region \$644M in funding for public transport and roads, including \$233 million for public transport and \$411 million on roads. It also secured \$129M for health services. Plus SHOROC won the PIA’s President’s Award for excellence in planning.

- NSW Treasury (T-Corp) places Pittwater in the Top 10 Metropolitan Councils for current and future financial sustainability.
- Council has the ability to manage major planning projects and liaise with the NSW Government e.g. Warriewood Development, Ingleside Development, Major grants for infrastructure including wharfs and car parks, BRT, SHOROC
- Unlike Warringah, Pittwater Council has never been placed into administration. Indeed Pittwater reduced the debt transferred from Warringah and balanced the budget

### **Pittwater Council is INDEPENDENT**

- Councillors are not affiliated to political parties or obvious developer or other vested interests.
- Council won the A R Bluett Memorial Award in 2003, making Pittwater the Best and Most Progressive Council in NSW. They were a finalist in 2013.
- Development is based on a network of town and village centres – NOT developer driven High Rise or ad hoc developments well above the tree line.
- All councillors voted for the Status Quo at the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015 Council meeting.
- Mega Councils will erode social and community benefits, and increase the opportunities for undue influence and corruption. Mega councils will mean bigger election campaigns and a greater need to raise funds that only the major parties can afford. Local government elections have lax rules with no donation caps and inadequate disclosure requirements, this despite Council's ability to deliver massive private benefit. There is therefore a huge risk that a Mega Council will become dominated by political and developer interests.

### **Pittwater Council is LOCAL**

- It connects well with its community and is very reactive to LOCAL issues. It looks after and supports our unique off-shore communities
- It creates guidelines which respect the special environmental features that give Pittwater its charm and character. It encourages appropriate development in the area and encourages the growth of local, native flora and fauna.
- It understands local issues and comes up with tailored and leading edge solutions. E.g. Placemaking techniques in Mona Vale and Avalon town centres, State/Council/Community joint planning at Ingleside
- It has important specific issues e.g. inherited infrastructure backlog, poor public transport and the future of Mona Vale Hospital.
- Councillor representation is very good. Approximately 6,900 residents per councillor
- Pittwater has 25% of the Sydney Coastline, nine ocean beaches, and large parts of the Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park. Since secession it has added 140 hectares of environmentally significant open space.
- Residents do not want to hand over custodianship of their pristine and precious environment and their way of life to anyone other than Pittwater Council. Pittwater is a special place of immense beauty but needs sympathetic and careful planning with the Council acting as custodians of the area, its culture, its planning laws etc. Examples include: saving and restoring Currawong, Barrenjoey Headland, Avalon Sand Dunes, Warriewood Wetlands, Winnererremy Bay, Avalon Old Wharf Reserve, Angophara Reserve.

### **MEGA COUNCILS don't work**

- International research and domestic experience tell us that councils between 40K and 75K residents are the most efficient and effective. <https://pittwaterforever.wordpress.com/pittwater-is-fit/bigger-councils-cost-more-rates-will-go-up/> and <https://cabpra.wordpress.com/pittwater-fit-for-the-future/pittwater-obese-is-not-fit/>
- Pittwater Council has an ideal size at 62K residents
- The average population of local councils in OECD countries is 27.2K whilst the average size of Sydney based councils is almost 4 times that number at 104.5K. ie Sydney councils are already vastly bigger than the global average. <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/parliamentary-inquiry-into-fit-for-the-future-council-amalgamations-could-cause-delays-20150526-gha23h.html>

- Two independent reports by the eminent local government specialist Prof Brian Dollery found a merger of the three Northern Beaches Councils would not improve financial sustainability, Ref: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/no-evidence-that-local-government-amalgamations-will-improve-performance-20150504-1mzezy.html>, and
- There was no evidence to support a strong joint “community of interest” across Manly, Warringah and Pittwater, an essential prerequisite for any successful merger. Indeed there is strong evidence to support a unique “Peninsula Living Lifestyle” for Pittwater residents
- The underlying premise of the scale and capability IPART evaluation is that large councils are more effective and more efficient than small councils. There is no evidence to support this gross assumption.

### **Merging Councils is costly and highly disruptive**

- NSW Government has released no evidence showing that Councils amalgamations are beneficial or that “bigger is better”.
- Merging councils is an expensive messy business: putting in place new IT systems, work practices, new offices, staff transfers, redundancies and changed cultures is time consuming, soul destroying and non-productive.
- Merging Councils is full of economic, social and political RISK. E.g. QLD, VIC, NZ.
- The forecast costs of merging are usually always underestimated – by a very large amount – and the savings generally do not materialise, with the ratepayers picking up the costs.
- No due diligence has been performed and no one is checking the veracity of any claims for Council amalgamation benefits
- Rates would almost certainly go up by between 8% and 12% in an amalgamation model, with greater risk of rate income being spent elsewhere.

### **Community Support.**

- Pittwater Forever supports OPTION 1 (No Merger).
- A number of the Pittwater Forever residents groups have lodged objections to the IPART draft assessment model in regards to lack of non-financial benchmarks, lack of due diligence, the NSW Government's assumption that “bigger is better” , and finally the very low emphasis placed on community, environmental and cultural values .
- 91% of residents are satisfied with Pittwater Councils overall performance (2014 survey). Approximately 88% of residents surveyed to date by Pittwater Council want the Status Quo - Option 1 – No Merger. At the 19<sup>th</sup> May Community Meeting there was unanimous support for No Merger and retention of current boundaries.
- The results above have been achieved without any coercion, PR/Press campaign by Pittwater Council, who throughout the voting period maintained a neutral line as recommended by IPART. This is in strong contrast to Warringah Council’s biased and expensive publicity campaign in favour of their recommended option.
- Pittwater residents and Council are not alone in wishing to fend off forced amalgamations. Many Sydney Metropolitan Councils think the same way. Ref: <http://clovermoore.com.au/future-of-local-government-in-nsw/>
- Option 1 (No Merger) has the **least risk** compared to Options 2 and 3. Least risk of huge financial blowouts (i.e. mergers), least risk of over development or inappropriate development, least risk of being disconnected from the local community, least risk of losing independent councillors and least risk of rate income being spent elsewhere.
- The community view as expressed unanimously at the 19<sup>th</sup> May residents meeting is that **Pittwater must remain independent and continue on its present boundaries and that no amalgamation should be considered without community support.**

## Improvements in Services and Infrastructure.

Pittwater Forever suggests that Pittwater Council take advantage of the Fit for the Future opportunity to improve its infrastructure and service delivery in the following key areas:

- Accelerate the implementation of Pittwater Council's Active Transport strategy including but not limited to more footpaths in areas away from town & village centres, cycling infrastructure, education campaigns, parking demand management, greater week day utilisation of Rowland Reserve car park etc.
- Provide/encourage better diversity of non-car transport options for all age groups: BRT, mini-bus shuttles, more ferries, scooters, cycles
- Redirect capital works over the next ten years away from new services to meet our footpath improvement program
- Put more **LOCAL** back into Local Government. Work more closely with resident groups on joint projects such as "adopt a pathway" and "Community Gardens". Also work with key resident groups prior to annual budget to agree the forthcoming capital works programs for each resident area. This will ensure expenditure is channelled where residents' priorities lie. It may even save money on unwanted projects.
- Review the current Place Management Plans for villages and ensure all villages have one
- Actively encourage affordable housing in the area
- Expand the role and influence of SHOROC perhaps by merging with NSROC. Increase buying power and shared services, increase advocacy on issues such as planning, health, transport infrastructure and the environment
- If not already in existence, NSW Local Government to establish a Best Practice Centre within the Sydney Metropolitan Area where councils can submit good practices that have worked for them and lever off the practices of others. E.g. Coastal & Environmental management.
- Improve our Development Unit at Council by appointing an architect advisory panel.

David Owen

President CABPRA

Member Pittwater Forever Group

Version V4 July 2015