

Greens Policies on Local Environment and Amalgamations - for Newport Residents Association

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to outline Greens' policies relevant to the local environment and council amalgamations.

I hope my answer provided below are a help.

1. What steps can your party take for the preservation of the unique built and green environment of Pittwater?

The Greens were founded on the vision of a robust and healthy environment. We work hard – at all levels of government – to realise that vision.

Campaigns Northern Beaches Greens have supported to protect the Pittwater environment include:

- the fight to save Mona Vale Hospital – we will continue to support efforts to retain an important role for this facility
- defence of Currawong
- the fight to stop the development of Careel Bay marina
- We were instrumental in the development of plans to protect the Narrabeen catchment area.

Some of our members and supporters are involved in local council reference groups and actively work in other community groups, helping protect and enhance the character of Pittwater. They may not always fly their party colours, but remain active and committed.

However, if elected, I will formalise some of that involvement by establishing a local council reference group in the Northern Beaches Greens group – our local branch of the party – to help guide our activities on local government issues, including the environment.

Greens Federal Environment Policy

This has two major proposals that will help protect the environment at the local level:

- A New Environment Act. This would limit the minister's discretion to approve environmentally destructive developments and give him/her responsibility for all aspects of the environment when the impact is significant.
- An Independent Environment Watchdog - The National Environment Protection Authority (NEPA). The NEPA would enforce the rules, fact-check and independently review all environmental impact assessments.

Policies explicitly designed to improve community participation in environmental protection and access to information include:

- Greater opportunities for community consultation on major projects under the new Environment Act.
- Ensuring the right to advocate for community organisations to protect their local area. Organisations are currently "gagged" by conditions in federal funding agreements.

- Enabling ordinary citizens to challenge environmentally damaging decisions - based on their merits – in court.
- Changing court rules to prohibit costs orders in public interest cases and undertakings as to damages (\$2 million over the forward estimates)
- Setting up a community information unit to actively support community understanding and engagement under our national environment laws (\$500,000 a year from within the budget of the NEPA).
- Certification scheme that ensures environmental impact assessments for proposals are unbiased, funded at \$8 million over 4 years from within the environment watchdog's budget.

On specific issues:

Marine Sanctuaries

The Greens are campaigning to reintroduce marine sanctuaries – which could be a win for unique coastal areas in Mackellar, such as Long Reef.

(<http://greens.org.au/marine>)

Tree Canopy

I support the NSW Greens campaign against Premier Mike Baird's proposed developer-friendly repeal of the Native Vegetation Act - which will enable tree clearing to increase in urban as well as rural areas and cause significant loss of wildlife habitat. (<http://greens.org.au/precious-places>)

2. What are your party's policies on an amalgamation roll-back?

I am committed to working to strengthen democracy at all levels of government, including local councils.

At a state level, the Greens have said we will support and campaign for respect for local government and will develop legislation for binding plebiscites on de-merging in all forcibly amalgamated council areas in NSW.

The Greens will also work to ban property developers and real estate agents from standing for council – to restore trust in local governments.

At a federal level, the Greens are committed to introducing recognition of local government into the constitution to protect it from the whims of state governments and to guarantee its federal funding.

-Mike Hall, Greens Candidate for Mackellar