



4 April 2016

Mr Ian Reynolds
Delegate for North Sydney, Willoughby City and Mosman Councils
Boundaries Commission

Email: Ian.Reynolds@dpc.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir,

Submission re: North Sydney, Willoughby City and Mosman Councils Proposal

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed merger of North Sydney Council, Willoughby City Council and Mosman Council ("the Combined Councils").

We are very appreciative of the opportunity to discuss community issues and concerns and work together to achieve optimal outcomes for the Combined Councils LGA. As an independent association, Artarmon Progress Association, Inc. (APA) considers that it can act as a pathway, not only between council and community, but also between the community and other levels of government whose decisions often impact locally.

Overview

APA considers that Willoughby City Council should stand alone and not merge with any neighboring councils.

We do not see any significant benefits from combining Willoughby, North Sydney and Mosman and therefore do not support the proposed three council merger.

If the NSW Government does merge councils by decree, APA would prefer that such a merger reflect the natural people flows within the region as discussed under the Alternative Proposal outlined below, by combining Willoughby, Lane Cove, North Sydney and Mosman into an Expanded Combined Councils LGA with the waterways as the natural boundaries.

NORTH SYDNEY, WILLOUGHBY AND MOSMAN MERGER PROPOSAL

Comments on Legislative Criteria

Based on the Merger Proposal for the Combined Councils, APA offers the following comments and recommendations.

These are listed in accordance with the legislative criteria set out on page 11 of the Appendix to the Merger Proposal:

a) Financial advantage or disadvantages

The APA, in its earlier submission on the proposed merger of North Sydney and Willoughby City Councils, acknowledged that cost, operational and strategic efficiencies **should be** available to the Combined Councils following amalgamation.

However, given the major costs savings achieved by Willoughby City Council in its recent management reorganization and North Sydney Council's financial position, it is difficult to imagine further financial benefits accruing from adding Mosman LGA into a Combined Councils LGA.

The APA is concerned that the cost of amalgamation has been under-estimated and may negate any operational cost savings made, in particular the cost of implementing the new mandatory ICT Computer System which we understand will be substantial. (Estimated by Willoughby City Council to be \$45mio for a three council merger.)

The pegging of rates for four years will not help the financial sustainability of the Combined Councils as services need to be maintained and we do not see any material cost savings during this period to offset inflation. This rate pegging will not be in the long term interests of ratepayers as it will require catch up revenue to be raised in later years i.e. a user pays system should apply.

b) Community of interest and geographic cohesion

- **Name of amalgamated council area – North Shore**

We consider that the name of any combination of lower North Shore Council LGAs should be "North Shore City Council" to reflect its geographic location.

- **St Leonards**

Currently, the suburb of St Leonards is split between three councils and this has resulted in poor planning/zoning decisions.

To permit better local area planning near St Leonards Station, the northern parts of Greenwich, the Royal North Shore Hospital and the nearby Gore Hill and Artarmon industrial zone, boundaries for the Combined Council LGA should be changed to incorporate all of the area near St Leonards Railway Station which presently falls within the Lane Cove LGA.

The Greenwich portion referred to is bounded by Pacific Highway, Greenwich Road, River Road and the Railway line.

- **Mosman**

Mosman has more affinity with North Sydney City Council than with Willoughby because of their shared geographic situation and waterways frontage as well as population movements through the LGAs. Willoughby City Council LGA has no direct geographic connection with Mosman.

- **Community Facilities**

Council owned properties such as town halls, community buildings should be retained by local communities.

We are not in favour of any of them being sold for short term financial gain or to cover merger costs shortfalls as we consider once sold, they will never be replaced.

We recognise that some repurposing of buildings will be required and the need for others to be purchased or leased to fill a community or operational need such as a new Administrative Centre.

c) Historical and traditional values

The APA has worked tirelessly for the last 20 years to raise community awareness concerning the importance of our built heritage in the Artarmon Conservation Area.

We have been very successful in that work, resulting in a high level of understanding and appreciation of the architectural, aesthetic, environmental and economic value of preserving and conserving the character of the Artarmon Conservation Area.

There is generally an intact single-storied Federation and Inter-Wars housing streetscape in the Artarmon Conservation Area that is worthy of continued preservation.

In order to retain the character of the Combined Councils built environment, it is important to retain and protect the established conservation areas and built heritage items of interest, presently included in the current individual Council Local Environmental Plans.

d) Attitude of residents and ratepayers

APA and the community are concerned that despite financial incentives to amalgamate, **merger costs will be substantially higher than the subsidy received from NSW Government** and will impose an additional financial burden on the community with long term financial consequences for ratepayers.

The NSW Government has justified council mergers on the basis of an opportunity for costs savings and improved services and facilities.

The APA is concerned that the cost of amalgamation has been under-estimated and may negate any operational cost savings made, **in particular the cost of implementing the new mandatory ICT Computer System which we understand will be substantial.** (See estimated cost in a) above.)

The pegging of rates for four years will not help the financial sustainability of the Combined Councils as services need to be maintained and we do not see any material cost savings during this period to offset inflation. **This rate pegging will not be in the long term interests of ratepayers** as it will require catch up revenue to be raised in later years i.e. a user pays approach should be adopted.

e) Elected representation

The APA supports Councillors being full time paid positions. This should ensure a higher professional standard of Councillor, make them more visible to the public, and hopefully reduce the likelihood of candidates with vested interests being elected.

Willoughby has found the system of a popularly elected mayor very successful but, **we see advantages in having the Mayor elected by fellow Councillors during any integration period.**

Population numbers for the Combined Council would be 175,467:
(Number of current Councillors in brackets)

Willoughby LGA (13)	74,166 = 5,705 p.c.
North Sydney (10)	71,025 = 7,102 p.c.
Mosman (10)	<u>30,276</u> = <u>3,028</u> p.c.
Total (33 Councillors)	<u>175,467</u> = <u>5,317</u> per councillor.

Source: Council Websites

If Mosman amalgamates with Willoughby and North Sydney, the number of Councillors would be reduced from 33 to the new maximum of 15. **This would be a substantial reduction in representation, diversity of opinion and access for residents** (residents per councillor would increase from 5,317 to 11,698), **which APA does not find acceptable.**

An approach to representation of six wards of three councillors each would require 18 councillors, not the current limit of 15 set out in legislation (residents per councillor would increase from 5,317 to 9,748). APA supports a change in legislation to make an 18 councillor proposal happen.

1) Adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities

The APA considers that the administrative centre for a Combined Council LGA should be centrally located and have easy access for the public by road (and to parking) and public transport.

The APA supports localized service centres being maintained in Chatswood, North Sydney and Mosman.

The current sharing of various services and facilities between councils, such as the Shorelink Library service, should continue.

2) Impact on employment of staff

The APA sees it as desirable to retain selected senior staff during any merger process so that valuable local knowledge is not lost and can facilitate transition.

4&5) Desirability of wards / Opinions of diverse communities effectively Represented

The APA would like the current ward system with three councillors per ward to continue. We have found this system to be highly effective.

The broad base and wealth of knowledge of Councillors, their continuity of advocacy, as well as their varied interests and political affiliations, has ensured balanced and equitable representation within Willoughby LGA for our highly diverse community.

APA supported Willoughby City Council's proposal for five Wards with three Councillors each for the Willoughby/North Sydney Proposal.

The inclusion of Mosman into the proposal and keeping the Councillor numbers capped at 15 **would greatly reduce representation** across the Combined Council LGA (**residents per councillor to increase from 5,317 to 11,698**).

This would be a most unsatisfactory outcome for the Combined Councils LGA residents and APA considers 18 councillors in six wards would be more appropriate (residents per councillor would increase from 5,317 to 9,748).

The APA considers further broader public consultation is required to decide the electoral system best suited to the Combined Councils LGA.

f) Other factors

The Combined Councils LGA will have a large daily transient population travelling into the area for work, shopping, healthcare, child care, education and leisure.

There are high levels of demand for leisure services in the new Combined Councils LGA, with particularly high usage of all sporting facilities, playgrounds, parks and

reserves. Many participants in sporting activities in the LGA reside elsewhere in Sydney.

This demand for increased leisure services will rise as increased housing density continues unabated within Sydney Metropolitan Area. The costs of meeting this increased demand for leisure facilities imposes an additional financial burden on ratepayers in the new LGA. Councils do not currently receive any subsidies from the NSW Government to provide these facilities.

Availability of Primary School and High School places in the Combined Councils LGA is also of concern to the APA and residents. All schools in the Willoughby City area have reached their capped numbers. It is recognized that this is a State Government matter but has a bearing on planning issues for the new LGA.

Willoughby City Council

Willoughby City Council has willingly taken up amalgamation initiatives and in the process has established a good working relationship with NSW Government.

The APA has a close working relationship with the Council which has enabled better community outcomes for our residents. We trust that the Government will give appropriate weight to Council's recommendations and requests in light of their thoughtful and co-operative approach to all issues.

AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

APA would prefer to have Willoughby City Council stand alone.

If a merger by NSW Government decree does eventuate, it would make more sense to have the Lane Cove LGA incorporated into an amalgamated Willoughby and North Sydney Proposal than to include the Mosman LGA.

The inclusion of Mosman LGA into the Willoughby/North Sydney merger proposal does not add any value to the residents of Willoughby.

The inclusion of the Lane Cove LGA would have the potential to do so as there are natural population flows for employment, business, retail and leisure activities from these areas through the Willoughby and North Sydney LGAs.

As the waterways provide a natural boundary for any new LGA, there is merit attached to having an Expanded Combined Councils LGA incorporating Willoughby, Lane Cove, North Sydney and Mosman into one municipality.

The Lane Cove River, Parramatta River, Port Jackson and Middle Harbour are the natural boundaries for an Expanded Combined Councils LGA with the northern boundary needing further research. We note that Willoughby City Council proposed that part of Roseville Chase be incorporated into a North Sydney/Willoughby LGA, given current natural population flows.

The Expanded Combined Councils LGA would have the following major shopping centres Chatswood, Castlecrag, Lane Cove, St Leonards, Crows Nest, North Sydney, Neutral Bay,

Cremorne and Mosman to service residents, with the most important of these commercial centres being Chatswood, St Leonards and North Sydney.

However, this alternative merger proposal would have a population base of 190,167: (Number of current Councillors in brackets)

Willoughby LGA (13)	74,166 = 5,705 p.c.
Lane Cove LGA (9)	14,700 = 1,633 p.c.
North Sydney (10)	71,025 = 7,102 p.c.
Mosman (10)	<u>30,276</u> = <u>3,028</u> p.c.
Total (42 Councillors)	<u>190,167</u> = <u>4,528</u> per councillor

Source: Council Websites

APA considers that reducing councillor numbers from 42 to 15 under this merger proposal would be a step too far, as residents per councillor would increase from 4,528 to 12,678.

A more reasonable outcome would be to have seven wards of three councillors or 21 councillors, each representing 9,056 residents. It is recognized that legislation will need to be changed to increase the councillor limit from 15 to 21.

CONCLUSION

APA is very satisfied with the performance of Willoughby City Council and would prefer it to stand alone.

We do not see any significant benefits from combining Willoughby, North Sydney and Mosman and therefore do not support the proposed three council merger.

If there is to be an Expanded Combined Councils LGA by NSW Government decree, APA would prefer it to reflect the people flows within the region as discussed under the Alternative Proposal above, by merging Willoughby, Lane Cove, North Sydney and Mosman Councils (merging with the latter reluctantly).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Willoughby, North Sydney and Mosman Council Amalgamation Proposal and to participate proactively in the merger process.

Yours faithfully,
Christine Kelley
President

Who we are

The Artarmon Progress Association, Inc. (APA) was founded in 1906 as a not-for-profit group and our objectives are to promote the welfare, physical and intellectual advancement of the suburb of Artarmon and the City of Willoughby, to protect the interests of the residents, and to encourage a keener spirit of citizenship and mutual help amongst residents.

Our newsletter, the *Artarmon Gazette*, is distributed quarterly to over 5,000 homes and businesses in Artarmon. We regularly communicate with residents and act as a conduit between local residents and elected representatives on matters concerning our local community.