



1 February 2016

Mr Ian Reynolds
Delegate for North Sydney & Willoughby City Councils
Boundaries Commission

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

Dear Sir,

Submission re: North Sydney and Willoughby City Councils Proposal

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed merger of North Sydney Council and Willoughby City Council.

Benefits of Amalgamation

Artarmon Progress Association (APA) recognizes the potential benefits of the amalgamation of North Sydney and Willoughby City Councils, including:

- Improved council performance
- Financial savings and reduced rates
- Upgrading of infrastructure and community facilities
- Strengthening and better integration of strategic centres
- Stronger advocacy and ability to partner with NSW and Federal governments on implementation of regional priorities.

We also recognize that changes such as those proposed are never easy. We are very appreciative of the opportunity to discuss community issues and concerns and work together to achieve optimal outcomes for the greater council area.

Comments on Legislative Criteria

Based on the Merger Proposal for North Sydney Council and Willoughby City Council, APA would like to make the following comments and recommendations. These are listed in accordance with the legislative criteria set out on page 18 of the Appendix to the Merger Proposal:

a) Financial advantage or disadvantages

The APA accepts that cost efficiencies should be available to the new LGA following amalgamation, as mentioned above.

b) Community of interest and geographic cohesion

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

We consider that the name of the amalgamated council area should be “North Shore City Council” to reflect the geographic location of the amalgamated Council area.

- **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 new Council area should be changed to incorporate all of the area near St Leonards Railway Station which presently falls within the Lane Cove Local Government Area (LGA).

- **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 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 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.

The preservation of the integrity of the built environment is vital to this understanding and appreciation, and ultimately adds to the value to the community and to individual properties.

In order to retain the character of the both North Sydney and Willoughby built environment, it is important to retain and protect the established conservation areas and built heritage items of interest, presently included in the Willoughby and North Sydney Local Environmental Plans.

d) Attitude of residents and ratepayers

The APA expects some resistance from residents to any large increases in rates payable. However, the APA acknowledges that the amalgamation of North Sydney Council and Willoughby City Council should assist in make the combined entity more cost efficient which should permit better community facilities and services over time.

e) Elected representation

Willoughby has found the system of a popularly elected mayor very successful.

The APA supports the continuation of this electoral process for the new council but would prefer to see 14 councillors (rather than 12) plus a directly elected Mayor for the new Council, with all councillors being full time paid positions.

This should ensure a high professional standard of councillor, make them more visible to the public, and hopefully reduce the likelihood of candidates with vested interests being elected.

1) Adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities

The APA considers that the administrative centre for the new 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 and North Sydney.

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

2) Impact on employment of staff

No comment.

3) Impact on rural communities

Not applicable.

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.

We do not consider the reduction from 8 wards to 4 wards for the new LGA to be appropriate. The APA considers further broader public consultation is required to decide the electoral system best suited to the new Council area eg to continue with the present Ward system or an alternative one such as one councillor per ward or two councillors in six Wards.

f) Other factors

The new 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 LGA with particularly high usage of all sporting facilities, playgrounds, parks and reserves. Many of the participants in sporting activities in the LGA reside elsewhere in Sydney.

The APA does not see this demand for increased leisure services reducing any time soon as increased housing density continues unabated within Sydney Metropolitan Area.

It should be acknowledged that this puts an additional financial burden on the new Council.

Availability of Primary School and High School places in the expanded 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.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Merger Proposal.

Yours faithfully,

Christine Kelley
President

Who we are

The Artarmon Progress Association (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.