

Council merger gaffe: Gabrielle Upton's petition push undermines Premier Mike Baird

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EXCLUSIVE Miles Godfrey State Political Reporter



Gabrielle Upton says she opposes council mergers

ATTORNEY-GENERAL Gabrielle Upton has made another gaffe after it emerged that she urged residents in her own electorate to sign a petition opposing the state government's council amalgamation plans.

In a move that is likely to infuriate ministerial colleagues and undermines Premier Mike Baird, Ms Upton told cheering locals at an anti-amalgamations rally that Woollahra Council should not be merged and that "small can be effective".

The Baird government has consistently argued that Sydney needs larger, more modern local authorities.

NSW Attorney General Gabrielle Upton has followed up her driver drama by urging her electorate to petition against council mergers.

“I believe there is no perfect size for a council and what works here may not work for those that are three streets to our south. I do believe small can be effective,” Ms Upton told the Hands Off Our Council rally in Double Bay.

“Let me be clear about my position on this issue — my position is that Woollahra Council should not be merged with other councils if it has the community support and the numbers stack up.”

Ms Upton urged people at the meeting to collect as “many signatures as we can gather” on a petition opposing the forced amalgamation of Woollahra Council that she intended to table in Parliament.

Sources claim Ms Upton agreed to accept the Woollahra petition on the steps of Parliament House but later reneged on the offer after being ordered not to by the state government.

Ms Upton spoke at the Double Bay rally on October 11, just days before the pricing regulator ruled that Woollahra Council (and 28 other Sydney councils) was unfit for the future.

There is strong community support for the eastern suburbs authority to remain independent.



Ms Upton made her controversial comments at this anti-merger rally in Guilfoyle Park, Double Bay.

Ms Upton backtracked on her stance last night and said she supports the government’s position.

“The NSW government has now received and responded to the IPART report, and the Attorney-General supports that position,” Ms Upton’s spokesman said.

The leaking of her comments comes at a highly sensitive time — with a deadline imposed upon unfit councils to submit revised merger options now just one week away. Those that don’t submit revised proposals face being sacked and forcibly amalgamated.

The day after Ms Upton addressed the Double Bay rally Premier Mike Baird told a Local Government Association conference that councils had to merge.

“There is no doubt that if we have less councils, we have hundreds of millions of dollars that can be put to work for our ratepayers,” he said.

Comments



Ken D1 hour ago

I reckon Mike Baird has appointed a few duds to his cabinet exposing a few cracks in his teflon image. His insistence for council amalgamation could be his downfall, I recall under the Beatty/Bligh Queensland government they forced the Noosa Council to merge with Maroochydore and in doing so increased costs to t's ratepayers and with it a dive in service delivery, under the Newman government that decision was reversed and all is now well in Noosa.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/council-merger-gaffe-gabrielle-uptons-petition-push-undermines-premier-mike-baird/story-fni0cx12-1227604218703>