

REPORT TO HUNTERS HILL COUNCIL FROM SHHMC DATED 11 FEBRUARY 2013

INTRODUCTION

- The *Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition* (SHHMC) was reactivated in early December 2012 to meet the real and present threat by the State Government that it is about to break its election promise of no forced amalgamations. Hunters Hill has been listed as one of a number of councils likely to be amalgamated.
- SHHMC strongly supports and values the election commitments made by the Mayor and all Councillors of no amalgamation; maintaining the integrity and independence of Council; and protecting our significant heritage, environmental and community values.
- SHHMC addressed the Council on 10 December 2012. Notes of that address are attached.

ACTIONS

- This report is intended to bring the Council up-to-date with the actions and views of SHHMC since that address.
- SHHMC has created a website www.savehuntershill.org which contains a 'Position Statement', information about SHHMC including its convenors and precinct coordinators, the history and heritage of Hunters Hill, submissions, reports, media articles, what's at stake for this community and what we can all do about it.
- We have met with the Mayor and General Manager and have discussed the matter of a submission to the Review Panel and its contents.
- We met with the local State member Anthony Roberts MP on 14 December 2012. He publicly stated that he was strongly opposed to any amalgamation of Hunters Hill; that it is a "National Treasure" and its Council and community highly valued; and that economies of scale can be achieved through the ROCs structure. This has been a long held view. The Mayor was in attendance. A further meeting is scheduled for 15 February 2013.
- We met with the Shadow Minister for Local Government Sophie Cotsis MLC on 19 December 2012. We are seeking meetings with other relevant members of Parliament including the Minister for Local Government Don Page MP. We also intend to see our Federal member Joe Hockey.
- We attended a meeting of the Mayors of Mosman, Pittwater, Manly and Hunters Hill on 23 January 2013.
- There has been media coverage including an interview by the Local Member with TWT.
- SHHMC Convenors and coordinators have met and considered future actions and strategies.

SHHMC VIEWS

- **Community Feeling:** There is growing concern and annoyance within the Hunters Hill community that the Government has not come out strongly with an announcement that there will be no amalgamation of Hunters Hill with any of the surrounding councils now or in the future, and that it

will be properly protected as an independent municipality by legislation. It is one of Australia's most significant historic local government areas and Australia's oldest 'garden suburb' and warrants such protection.

- **Viability:** Hunters Hill is viable and efficient in the delivery of services and planning functions for its community. It is highly regarded by the community and generally.
- **No Amalgamation:** The Hunters Hill community has consistently and fully rejected the need for amalgamation with other councils on efficiency, community and heritage grounds.
- **Value for Money:** Hunters Hill utilises a range of processes to ensure value for money is obtained by the Council on behalf of its community. These include use of local contractors, tendering (eg road and footpath maintenance, waste services) and collaborative/ joint venture arrangements with other councils (eg Metropool, NSROC, Library Services) for a whole range of services in a seamless and effective way.
- **Low Overheads:** Hunters Hill does not have the overhead of assets: it outsources through a contestable process most of its service provision and infrastructure work. It does not own capital items such as garbage trucks, street sweepers, concrete trucks, bitumen laying equipment, bulldozers, large excavators or tip trucks - these functions are all provided via competitive contracting.
- **No Justification for Change:** Neither the Government nor the Review Panel have placed any evidence on the table to demonstrate that Hunters Hill or for that matter any other council could do things in a better way. NSROC and Hunters Hill Council should challenge the Panel and the Government to put the facts on the table - put up or shut up. What is the benefit/cost analysis to justify changing the current system on a council by council basis?
- **Fundamental Roll of Local Government:** Councils exist to build and support communities and their associated commerce and businesses. They are not nor should ever be seen as corporate entities. Services and planning functions should reflect the particular local community's needs and aspirations.
- **The Problem:** The real problem is not with local government but with State Government. The State and Federal Governments have not provided adequate resourcing for infrastructure. State agencies have ad hoc ways of engaging with local government and have confusing institutional arrangements and boundaries/ regions. Other tiers of Government have for many years cost shifted services to local government without funding. Rate pegging has limited funding opportunities for local government. The State Government must address these issues rather than casting the blame on local government.
- **Planning Pressures:** Hunters Hill and most local government areas have met the State Government's requirements for development within their council areas. Hunters Hill has met its targets without the need to undermine its community and heritage values. It is the developers that are failing to utilise existing opportunities not the council. A reasonable inference can be drawn that the development lobby is trying to optimise its returns by applying pressure to the State government to allow ever-increasing access to prime real estate regardless of impact on local communities and heritage values.

Ross Williams

Emeritus Mayor (former Mayor of Hunters Hill);

Co-Convener of Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition

Address to Hunters Hill Council Meeting: 10 December 2012: Item H6

HUNTER'S HILL – "IT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR"

THE STATE Government is proposing a radical overhaul of local government and planning. The size and structure of Councils, a new planning system and Local Government Act - all are being presently considered.

A reading of various reports and papers recently released by the State government reveals a determination to take over control of local government, increase the size of councils, restrict the role of councillors and the community, and create a planning system essentially to green light developments.

These proposed changes if implemented would certainly take the 'local' out of 'local government' and overturn 150 years of history.

Who is Ross Williams:

- Speaking on behalf of the Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition as one of its Co-convenors;
- An Emeritus Mayor who has served 12 years on Hunter's Hill Municipal Council; and
- A passionate local resident supporting the values – sense of community, heritage and landscape that Hunters Hill represents.

What's at stake - Hunters Hill:

- Australia's oldest garden suburb and one of the nation's most significant heritage places and municipalities. It was one of the earliest municipalities established in 1861, and last year celebrated its Sesquicentenary;
- Contains more heritage buildings and places per head of population than any other local government area in the nation. Its heritage was saved from destruction by the direct action of its community; and
- Has a very strong sense of belonging and community and many long established cultural, sporting and community groups.

Previous Attempts:

- In the past all attempts to amalgamate Hunters Hill with surrounding councils have failed;
- Those seeking to do so came over time to realise the significance of the area to the nation, the strength of its community, and the many adverse impacts that would flow if it was amalgamated; and
- It simply makes no sense to destroy community spirit and cohesion and put at severe risk the nation's heritage.

Current Position:

- Unfortunately it appears that the State government, as articulated in their support for various suggestions in the recent Review Panel Report and comments made to the press, is heading down the same destructive path as other governments have travelled in the past;

- The threat is real and the Co-convenors of Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition, Phil Jenkyn and myself, have reactivated the Coalition that successfully defeated the last government's attempt in 2003 to amalgamate Hunters Hill;
- Precinct committees are being re-established, banners and ribbons in the colours of the municipality's crest prepared and submissions drafted; and
- SHHMC will work with relevant groups including Council to develop a position that captures the facts, benefits and community interest in maintaining a viable and vibrant Hunters Hill. Bigger is simply not better.

Council's Report Item H6:

- The report to council by the General Manager provided contextual and factual information to base a submission to the Review Panel;
- However it falls short of providing a workable model for future local governance in Hunters Hill. We should not be leaving it up to the Review Panel to design what would work for Hunter's Hill;
- The General Manager's report towards its conclusion does not in detail draw out the distinction between the viability of Hunters Hill as a local government entity and the broader issues facing all local government in providing for infrastructure and cost passing by other levels of government. This is further explained in the next report page H31 Paragraph 4; and
- Hunters Hill Council should consult with its community and provide if possible one voice and position to the Review Panel and Government in rejecting the merger or loss of local governance in Hunters Hill.

Recommendation to Council:

It is recommended that Council consider the following resolutions:

1. Council defer the report and consider it as a working draft providing background and context to a proposal to be developed on how best to deliver local governance in Hunters Hill; and
2. Council work with community in urgently developing a submission to the LG Review Panel providing strategic direction and leadership on the model for local governance in Hunters Hill and the important relationship it needs to maintain with Regional Organisations of Councils for collaborative activities and services.

Ross Williams

Emeritus Mayor (former Mayor of Hunters Hill);

Co-Convener of Save Hunters Hill Municipality Coalition