

**Transcript**  
**Kogarah Council Meeting**  
**Monday May 25, 2015**

**Apologies:**

Leave of absence for Cr Annie Tang, and a leave of absence for Cr Nickolas Varvaris.  
Moved by Cr Katsabaris, seconded by Cr Smith.  
I declare that carried.

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**SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA**

**Item I.5:** NSW Local Government Reform Program – 'Fit for the Future'

**Author:** Paul Woods – General Manager

**Reason for report:** To determine the template to be utilised in Kogarah City Council's 'Fit for the Future' submission.

**Recommendation:**

- a) That the NSW Government's template 2: Council Improvement Proposal (Existing structure) be completed in accordance with the details contained within the report.
- b) That the submission be referred to in (a) above be presented to Council in June 2015 for consideration and endorsement prior to formal lodgement with IPART.

**Mayor Cr Platt.**

Now Councillors you would have all received over the last week quite a detailed amount that I am holding in my hand of information how the particular templates, choose 1 or 2, the methodology of assessment of Council's 'Fit for the Future'. The methodology, the IPART Report, the report from our consultants, which is (? Nathan Goodlake Knight Reedy), and of course the future of the City of Kogarah, what the NSW Government says for the project and what it means for the City of Kogarah.

Now that went out the length and breadth of Kogarah City Council and I just need a motion.

Moved by Cr Katris. Seconded by Cr Petroni.

Is there any opposition to that?

Would anyone like to speak to that recommendation at all?

**Mayor Cr Platt.**

1 Well me being me, I would like to say a few words if you don't mind because I think this is when anyone who would like to speak afterwards can, that, when you look at the community engagement that Council went through, it is very very extensive and on page 4 you will see it was on the website, background information in the Kogarah Life in March. A 12-page information brochure went to all of the community, and all the households throughout Kogarah municipality. We also facilitated a telephone survey of over 607 residents. And the result of that I thought was outstanding with 85% of the residents surveyed by telephone said they want Kogarah to stay as Kogarah.

2 And I have been saying it a few times it might be a bit hackneyed, but this is 'Fit for the Future' of Kogarah, it is fit for the present. We also had a dedicated email address for people to write in and receive

responses, we held two consultation sessions, the General Manager and myself with Council's Community Reference Group in October last year and May 2015 and as I said 85% of those surveyed said they wanted to stay as Kogarah, because in actual fact we meet all the criteria except for an arbitrary figure picked out in my view by the State Government of 450,000 which now they say they might drop to 250,000. Also, our consultant, (? Miles and Lohn) spent a lot of time researching putting their report, together and a lot of time with myself and the General Manager and executives, and their report clearly demonstrates that Kogarah City Council is only one of the Council's in NSW that backs up the rhetoric by the fact that we are meeting six of those seven criteria. We are debt free, we can meet everything now and going forward.

3 I was talking to Cr Katsabaris before and I said to him that if we were a franchise of McDonalds or the Commonwealth Bank or whom ever, out of all the Councils and I make no comment adversely against Canterbury, Rockdale or Hurstville, but if we were franchised, we are the only one of those that the franchisee, if that is the correct word for it, would keep going as they are, because we are debt free, because we meet all the criteria, because of all our infrastructure is good now and good for the future.

4 So if you look at it as a business model in my view you would keep Kogarah as it is. Other Councils want to join together and may need to, we don't, and I make no comment other than to say that from day one and I don't know whether the residents who are up in arms about a certain other activity, are aware that from the day that if we are amalgamated, the way the Government wants, we the residents, will inherit 24 million dollars of debt.

5 I had not heard one word, I have had no contact from others who are spending a lot of time attacking that other thing we are working on. Not one word to stay with Kogarah.

6 They may not realise that your representation will go from one to 6,000 to one to 26,000 per Councillor per resident. What hope will you have of having your voice heard?

7 Not the hope that people get now. And again I make no comment but this Council is not subject to a Section 430 investigation as one of the Councils that we are supposed to amalgamate with is, right at the moment, as we speak.

8 And if you look through all of this it shows that the residents want us to stay together, and it is my firm belief that we should stay together and I think we have all put a great deal of effort, a lot of concise facts and figures into putting the best case forward on behalf of the residents that we represent.

9 And we are not stopping there we will be going out and to the shopping centres over the next few weeks pushing that view that we need to stay together. If we want to keep the Council in a way we all operate together, we need the residents to get out there and say we want to stay together, because if we don't stay together everything changes from October.

10 LEP's come and go. 'Fit for the Future' is a one off.

11 Once that happens Kogarah will be finished if we can't stay together and we have got to fight really hard together, residents and Councillors, in my opinion. I would like to congratulate Paul [Woods] and Rod [Logan] and Andrew [Sharp] and Evan [Hutchings] and Eva and Rebecca and John Maunder, and every single Council person who has put this together because this is second to none and this Council is one, this is the facts, this Council, one of the only couple in NSW that can survive going forward.

12 We are fit for the present, we are debt free, and I for one want to keep it that way, and congratulations to Paul and the team, you have done a brilliant effort and I look forward to the Councillors coming out with me over the next few Saturday mornings to put the case again to the community over and above what we have already put here.

13 So does any other Councillor want to make a comment?

**Cr Katris.**

14 I totally support what you have just said Mr Mayor. My question is who is listening? That is the major issue, who is listening Mr Mayor?

15 We have a great Council, we have a great local government area and as I keep saying and banging my fists on the table, year after year, for the last how many years have I been on Council?, nearly 20 years, and you know, how many more years am I going to be here in Council? I don't know, at this point in time I am over 60 and may be it is time, I don't know.

16 What I do know is the last thing I want even when I leave this Council as a Councillor and become a resident like everybody else is, not one that sort of determines the fate for all the rest of the community, but one that is in there hoping that their Council will do a great job and great deeds. The last thing I want, the last thing I want, is to be amalgamated with Rockdale.

17 You have been magnanimous Mr Mayor, you have been very magnanimous with Rockdale and Hurstville, and the last thing I want is to be amalgamated with Rockdale or Canterbury or Hurstville.

18 Have a look at the headlines look what is happening there. Have a look at Hurstville what do I need to say, I won't say any more as I may get myself into trouble, because there is already a meeting happening in Hurstville tonight about something that has happened. I think by way of the Mayor, I do not remember, but I do remember that it is inappropriate and to actually censor your general manager.

19 Twenty years I have been on Council and we have had great General Manager's during that time, we have had great Council staff and we have had great Councillors. What have we got on the other Councils? The dynamics are incredible. Look at the dynamics at Rockdale, just have a look at that, 50% of the Councillors would not turn up for meetings.

20 I mean, how do we get around this? Do we end up getting a mixture of Kogarah, Hurstville and Rockdale, to run an amalgamated St George Council which is going to end up as a catastrophe because those people who will get back in there, those that are the most vociferous, and people who have got the money will bang their fists on the table.

21 Having said that, what do you need to do, just drive from Hurstville through to Kogarah through to Rockdale, the environment, the built environment, the roads, everything looks so much different as you are going through. But we are going to lose that, and as the Mayor quite rightly said we are going to be taking on other peoples debts, to lose that.

23 Look at Rockdale, how do you compare Rockdale with Kogarah? The Rockdale town centre, the Kogarah town centre, the Hurstville town centre, which once I called Gotham City and one of the mayor's said how dare you. They built these towers and you are walking around in the dark, and on the footpath down there at Hurstville.

24 Look at Kogarah, you are walking around Kogarah and it is sun drenched. OK there are some high buildings and some tall buildings. OK we have got some issues with the new LEP that we are looking at.

25 We have a number of people who are complaining about that, the LEP. I understand that and I don't want to bring into this argument, but I well understand this issue will be listened to. The people who have written in. People who have actually objected to some of these issues, they will be looked into.

26 I personally believe that is what I will be striving for, every area will get a chance to have their say with regards as to how those changes in the LEP will be taken on. That is what I believe and that is what I will be fighting for, and I am I will have support of the Councillors here and probably the Directors.

27 But having said that I go back to my first comment, who is listening? I mean unfortunately the amalgamations are going to happen through stealth. We have great reports here that Kogarah can stand on it's own, very much on its own and we don't owe anything. We are doing great things with buildings, roads, collection of rubbish, the whole lot, that the residents expect us to do.

28 It is a great Council, one of the things I lay confidence in is the fact that when we ask residents would they allow us to become a City, and you know I can understand if they decided to be very cynical behind that motivation to become a City. They would say no way you are going to get that, you will want more money, you will want more power, maybe you want more of this and that.

29 We got 85% of our residents who wanted us to become a City, why, because we are parochial, we love Kogarah, we like the local government area, we love what the Council has done over many many years , but this is now going to change, and why is it going to change, because the State Government said so. They are not going to look at us as that great little Council that is doing wonderful work, they are going to look at us, as putting us all together with Canterbury, Rockdale and Hurstville, and we get rid of a few Councils.

30 What are we talking about, a few Councils. You get rid of some top heavy staff and some of the executives, etc, and save what, about a million bucks maybe, and we are talking about a budget over the four Councils of, I don't know, what about one hundred million?

31 So what representations are the community going to get? How are we going to be more productive looking like Rockdale, looking like Hurstville? Do we really want that? We are not fighting for it and I can see that being distracted by something which I understand it is a real issue for many of us, the fact that that over development might happen next door to us, the fact that increased density is going to happen. But you know the problem we have got is that we are not listening to the real issue that over development is going to happen if we don't remain as Kogarah.

32 If we don't remain the local government of Kogarah I can assure you we will end up with Wollie Creek in Kogarah, we will end up with those huge towers in Hurstville in Kogarah, because that is what is going to happen.

33 Okay, this Council will at least listen to its residents and will take on board the objections that have been put to the Council, and I am sure that on the basis looking at each individual area separately, we will take into consideration those issues that are impacted on separate residents after we receive all the objections, but now we have just forgotten about the real issue and those amalgamations, and those amalgamations that we are going to be confronted with.

34 I am over 60. I am not looking to remaining a Councillor for an eternity. There is a physical problem with that, I can't do it. But having said that, what we have really got to look at and we are fortunate if we can get the get the help of our community is for an anti-amalgamation stand. The Mayor has done a real lot of hard work, the General Manager and Directors have done a real lot of hard work, but it is falling on deaf ears.

**Mayor Cr Platt.**

Any other comments? Cr Petroni.

**Cr Petroni.**

35 If I could just say that I wholeheartedly support your stand against amalgamation and I guess when I first considered the proposal you have to look at something on its merits. To me personally what I find most arrogant about this proposal is that it comes with great hypocrisy on behalf of the State Government.

36 In NSW about 14 years ago we saw the Labor Government led by Bob Carr at the time amalgamate Health Services in NSW. We went from a situation of amalgamating 23 health services down to 8 all on the premise that larger areas would deliver better cost savings, and deliver better services to people, deliver a better return for the budget, and a better service for the people of NSW.

37 Unfortunately, 10 years down the track what did we have, we had a total disaster in health care in this State, and it was one of the very first things that the incoming Liberal Government chose to change.

38 They put in that legislation within 7 days of coming to power to undo those amalgamations, and why did they undo those amalgamations, they undid them because what did they find, there was poor service delivery. Service delivery to health consumers in NSW had deteriorated dramatically, cost savings never eventuated in fact a lot of those area health service were in a total debacle around how still 10 years down the track how they could integrated into one unified service.

39 So I don't see that bigger is necessarily better I don't see that the situation with local government nis any different, and I think there is now a lot of evidence on the table. Evidence that is coming from interstate areas of local government, international evidence, and I just honestly don't see that the promises that are being made under this proposal are ever going to eventuate, whether it be 10 years or 20 years.

40 I'll admit there are definitely some issues with regard to particular areas within this State. I think there is a better way to resolve this problem. I don't think amalgamation is going to be the magical solution that everyone is going to get around to see.

41 I absolutely agree with you Cr Katris, it is falling on deaf ears. There are people who don't know the pain yet. The pain is coming. It will come, and in 10 years time this will all be reversed and at what cost to ratepayers, that is the question I am asking. I absolutely think this is total hypocrisy on behalf of this State Government. It is probably not living up to the standard they have set for themselves, and I would question why they would be perusing this in this particular climate.

42 And absolutely Cr Katris, as you have always maintained Kogarah is definitely the rose between two thorns here in the St George area, and in particular at this very immediate time I guess we are all pondering that question why are we as a Council that operates so well and delivers on its promises, delivers services to residents who are happy with what they are getting, why are we then forced into this situation?

43 I wholeheartedly support our position to stand alone.

**Mayor Cr Platt.**

Thank you Cr Petroni. Any further comments?

Being no further comments I will put that.

All those in favour please say aye, those against, I declare it carried unanimously.

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