



The Northern Action Group Inc.

Wellington amalgamation proposal ignores Auckland disaster

The Northern Action Group are dismayed the Local Government Commission has decided to propose yet another super city type amalgamation for the Wellington region. Their message to Wellington communities is to fight hard against it because local communities lose out and once amalgamated it is very difficult to de-amalgamate.

Four years ago the former Rodney District Council region was forced to come under the newly established Auckland Council super city. Chairman of the Group, Bill Townson says this has been a blatant power grab by the Council and a disaster for the community. Auckland Council now employs nearly 1,800 people paid more than \$100,000 p.a. and debts per ratepayer keep growing. One in every 140 people in Auckland works for the Council. The Mayor has lost support. Local Boards are toothless, the centre runs everything and local communities have stopped getting involved. Planning and consultation is endless and no-one listens.

“North Rodney residents now have a remote, urban focused council that takes more from ratepayers than it spends. People living in Warkworth and surroundings are having to travel 58ks to engage with the Council in the Unitary plan hearings. Our rates should be going into our own local area and community which is badly in need of better roading and services. We need a local council that is accountable to local communities. A one-size-fits-all model designed by an urban focused council hasn’t worked well for us and local democracy is a chimera! The Commission shouldn’t be making the same mistakes again in Wellington.”

The Northern Action Group filed legal proceedings against the Commission in July 2014 after the Commission decided not to assess their application to de-amalgamate from Auckland Council and establish a North Rodney Unitary Council. The hearing is in March 2015. Bill Townson says:

“In 2010 6300 of us signed a petition to Parliament to keep North Rodney out of the new supercity. This didn’t work. Parliament said we had to wait 3 years to try again. We waited the three years then polled again and more than 90% of those polled wanted out of Auckland Council. We put significant resources into making an application to the Commission. The Commission decided our application was not even worth assessing. They said we should have shown evidence of support from across the whole of Auckland rather than just the North Rodney affected area. We showed more support from our community than the Wellington Regional Council showed from theirs, and the Commission says our application is not in the public interest but apparently the WRC application is! They also decided Auckland Council needed more than three years to settle in and creating such uncertainty would undermine the Auckland public’s confidence in the Auckland Council. The residents of North Rodney no longer have confidence in

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the Auckland Council. The Commission has no right to stop de-amalgamation applications. It needs to let communities have a say in their own local government arrangements. Once amalgamated it will be nigh on impossible and very expensive to unravel (just ask our near neighbours in Noosa to say nothing of what's happened in Canada and the Netherlands who are desperately trying to unravel theirs."

The Northern Action Group will be watching the Wellington developments closely. The Auckland amalgamation is the only example of a large scale amalgamation in New Zealand and the same mistake shouldn't be forced on Wellington communities.

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