



KU-RING-GAI

MP hits back in battle over forced mergers

Kean condemns council for 'popping champagne' after appeal win in court

Jake McCallum

THE State Government may have been instructed to pay Ku-ring-gai Council's Supreme Court costs but one local MP says councillors are the ones "wasting hundreds of thousands".

A month after Ku-ring-gai Council won its appeal in the Supreme Court against forced amalgamation by the State Government, Hornsby state Liberal MP Matt Kean said the government continued to "review the court case and what it means for our agenda".

He could not, however, tell the *Advocate* if legal action would recommence.

"The government is still looking to pursue local government reform," he said.

"We are still committed to ensuring there is reform in the Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai area."

Mr Kean said he thought it was shocking that Ku-ring-gai councillors were

celebrating their appeal win by "popping champagne, while continuing to waste ratepayers money" – referencing a picture in the *Advocate*.

"Ku-ring-gai Council are wasting hundreds of thousands of taxpayers dollars," Mr Kean said. "(The State Government) will continue

to fight, because this is about ensuring there are long-term savings for rate-payers.

"I will continue to stand up for taxpayers and fight politicians that are more interested in protecting their perks and privileges."

Mr Kean would not comment on the current financial situation of Hornsby Council after the region south of the M2 was handed over to Parramatta Council as part of merger proceedings last year.

Ku-ring-gai state Liberal MP Alister Henskens said

he had always "treasured our area's streetscapes, bushland surrounds and sense of community" when asked where he stood on forced amalgamation.

"Whether the amalgamation proceeds or not, I have always said that the key thing is to retain the character of our suburban neighbourhoods," he said.

"I will continue to work hard to protect their unique nature."

Mr Henskens failed to answer the *Advocate's* questions on whether he continued to support forced amalgamation.

"The NSW Government is currently reviewing the

court decision," he said.

"Ensuring local residents have the best possible services is the government's highest priority."

Ku-ring-gai Mayor Jennifer Anderson said "no corks were popped" following the Court of Appeal win.

"Ku-ring-gai Council and

its residents were very pleased to mark the council's landmark win in the Court of Appeal with a celebratory photograph," she said.

"On a more important note, I can confidently state that Ku-ring-gai Council is financially strong and the interests of our ratepayers are not served by merging with Hornsby Shire.

"Council's longstanding position has been independently backed up by UTS academics and the judges of the Court of Appeal who agree that the government's process is flawed and the benefits that are purported to make councils more efficient are highly equivocal."

The State Government has not announced when, or if, legal action will continue against Ku-ring-gai Council.

Council elections for Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai are set for September.



Alister Henskens.



Matt Kean.