

Is Biggest Best? A Comparative Analysis of the Financial Viability of the Brisbane City Council

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Abstract

Structural reform through forced mergers has been a dominant feature of Australian local government for decades. Advocates of compulsory consolidation contend that larger municipalities perform better across a wide range of attributes, including financial sustainability. Although empirical scholars of local government have invested considerable effort into investigating these claims, no one has yet examined the performance of Brisbane City Council against other local authorities, despite the fact that it is by far the largest council in Australia. This paper seeks to remedy this neglect by comparing Brisbane with Sydney City Council, an average of six southeast Queensland councils and an average of 10 metropolitan New South Wales councils against four measures of financial performance over the period 2008–2011.

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