

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

Elisabeth Sinnewe, Michael A. Kortt, Brian Dollery

First published: 24 January 2015

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12118>

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.

References

Andrews, R. 2013. 'Local Government Amalgamation and Financial Sustainability: The Case of England and Wales'. *Public Finance and Management* 13(2): 124–141.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Bish, R. 2000. *Local Government Amalgamations: 19th Century Ideas for the 21st Century*. Toronto: Howe Institute.

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#).

[Manage Preferences](#)

[Accept All](#)

[Reject Non-Essential](#)

Byrnes, J. and B. Dollery. 2002. 'Do Economies of Scale Exist in Australian Local Government? A Review of the Research Evidence'. *Urban Policy and Research* 20(4): 391–414.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

DeCeuninck, K., H. Reynaert, K. Steyvers and T. Valcke. 2010. 'Municipal Amalgamations in the Low Countries: Same Problems, Different Solutions'. *Local Government Studies* 36(6): 803–822.

| [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

B. Denters and L. E. Rose (eds.). 2005. *Comparing Local Governance: Trends and Developments*. London: Palgrave.

| [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (DITRDLG). 2013. *2010-11 Local Government National Report*. Canberra: Australian Government.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

B. Dollery and L. Robotti (eds.). 2008. *Theory and Practice of Local Government Reform*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Dollery, B. E., J. Byrnes and L. Crase. 2008. 'Australian Local Government Amalgamation: A Conceptual Analysis of Population Size and Scale Economies in Municipal Service Provision'. *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies* 14(2): 167–175.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Dollery, B. E., L. Crase and A. Johnson. 2006. *Australian Local Government Economics*. Sydney: UNSW Press.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Manage Preferences](#)

[Accept All](#)

[Reject Non-Essential](#)

Dollery, B. E., M. A. Kortt and B. Grant. 2013b. *Funding the Future: Financial Sustainability and Infrastructure Finance in Australian Local Government*. Sydney: Federation Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Drew, J. and B. Dollery. 2014. 'Would Bigger Councils Yield Scale Economies in the Greater Perth Metropolitan Region? A Critique of the Metropolitan Local Government Review for Perth Local Government'. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 73: 128-137.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Drew, J., M. A. Kortt and B. Dollery. 2012. 'Economies of Scale and Local Government Expenditure: Evidence from Australia'. *Administration & Society* 46(6): 632-653.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Drew, J., M. A. Kortt and B. Dollery. 2013. 'A Cautionary Tale: Council Amalgamation in Tasmania and the Deloitte Access Economics Report'. *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 72(1): 55-65.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Drew, J., M. A. Kortt, and B. Dollery. 2014. 'Did the Big Stick Work? An Empirical Assessment of Scale Economies and the Queensland Forced Amalgamation Program'. *Local Government Studies* 1-14.doi: <http://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2013.874341>.

[Google Scholar](#)

Faulk, D. and G. Grassmueck. 2012. 'City-County Consolidation and Local Government Expenditures'. *State and Local Government Review* 44(3): 196-205.

[Google Scholar](#)

Faulk, D. and M. Hicks. 2011. *Local Government Consolidation in the United States*. New York: Cambria

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Manage Preferences](#)

[Accept All](#)

[Reject Non-Essential](#)

Feiock, R. C. 2004. ' Do Consolidation Entrepreneurs Make a Deal with the Devil?' In J. B. Carr and R. C. Feiock (eds.), *City-County Consolidation and its Alternatives Reshaping the Local Government Landscape* (pp. 39-52). Armonk: M. E. Sharpe.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Grant, B., B. Dollery and L. Crase. 2009. 'The Implications of the Lyons Report into Local Government in England for Structural Reform in Australian Local Government'. *International Journal of Public Administration* 32: 852-867.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Hlepas, N.-K. 2010. 'Incomplete Greek Territorial Consolidation: From the First (1998) to the Second (2008-09) Wave of Reforms'. *Local Government Studies* 36(2): 223-249.

| [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Independent Local Government Review Panel (ILGRP). 2013. *Revitalising Local Government*. Sydney: Independent Local Government Review.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Kreci, V. and B. Ymeri. 2010. 'The Impact of Territorial Re-Organisational Policy Interventions in the Republic of Macedonia'. *Local Government Studies* 36(2): 271-290.

| [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

S. Lago-Penas and J. Martinez-Vazquez (eds.). 2013. *Challenge of Local Government Size*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Leland, S. M. and K. Thurmaier. 2006. ' Lessons from 35 years of City-County Consolidation Attempts'. In *The Municipal Yearbook 2006* (pp. 3-10). Washington: International City/County Management Association.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Manage Preferences](#)

[Accept All](#)

[Reject Non-Essential](#)

Martin, L. L. and J. H. Schiff. 2011. 'City-County Consolidations: Promise versus Performance'. *State and Local Government Review* 43(2): 167-177.

| [PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Metropolitan Local Government Review (MLGR). 2012. *Final Report of the Independent Panel*. Perth: Metropolitan Local Government Review.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Moisio, A. and R. Uusitalo. 2013. 'The Impact of Municipal Mergers on Local Public Expenditures in Finland'. *Public Finance and Management* 13(3): 148-166.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

New South Wales Department of Local Government (NSWDLG). 2011. ' NSW Local Government Comparative Information, September 2011', Available from http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/dlg_DocumentsIndex.asp?mi=3&ml=2§ionid=1&documenttype=6&title=&year=#TSD [Accessed 30 June 2014].

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Oakerson, R. J. 1999. *Governing Local Public Economies: Creating the Civic Metropolis*. Oakland: ICS Press.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Queensland Department of Local Government (QDLG). 2012. ' Queensland Local Government Comparative Information, July 2012', Available from <http://www.dsdpip.qld.gov.au/about-local-government-and-councils/queensland-local-government-comparative-information.html> [Accessed 30 June 2014].

| [Google Scholar](#) |

Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC). 2008. *Financial Sustainability in Queensland Local Government*. Brisbane: QTC.

| [Google Scholar](#) |

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Manage Preferences](#)

[Accept All](#)

[Reject Non-Essential](#)

Reiljan, J., A. Jaansoo and A. Ülper. 2013. 'The Impact of Amalgamation on the Financial Sustainability of Municipalities in Estonia'. *Public Finance and Management* 13(2): 167-194.

[Google Scholar](#)

Sancton, A. 2011. *Canadian Local Government*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Swianiewicz, P. 2010. 'If Territorial Fragmentation is a Problem, is Amalgamation a Solution? An East European Perspective'. *Local Government Studies* 36(2): 183-203.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

TCorp (NSW Treasury Corporation). 2013. *Financial Sustainability of the New South Wales Local Government Sector*. Sydney: NSW Treasury Corporation.

[Google Scholar](#)

Vojnovic, I. 2000. 'The Transitional Impacts of Municipal Consolidations'. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 22(4): 385-417.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Vrangbæk, K. 2010. 'Structural Reform in Denmark, 2007-09: Central Reform Processes in a Decentralised Environment'. *Local Government Studies* 36(2): 205-221.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Wollmann, H. 2010. 'Territorial Local Level Reforms in the East German Regional States (Länder): Phases, Patterns, and Dynamics'. *Local Government Studies* 36(2): 251-270.

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Manage Preferences](#)

[Accept All](#)

[Reject Non-Essential](#)

ABOUT WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[About Cookies](#)

[Manage Cookies](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Wiley Research DE&I Statement and Publishing Policies](#)

HELP & SUPPORT

[Contact Us](#)

[Training and Support](#)

[DMCA & Reporting Piracy](#)

[Sitemap](#)

OPPORTUNITIES

[Subscription Agents](#)

[Advertisers & Corporate Partners](#)

CONNECT WITH WILEY

[The Wiley Network](#)

[Wiley Press Room](#)

Copyright © 1999-2026 John Wiley & Sons, Inc or related companies. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial intelligence technologies or similar technologies.

WILEY

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Manage Preferences](#)

[Accept All](#)

[Reject Non-Essential](#)