



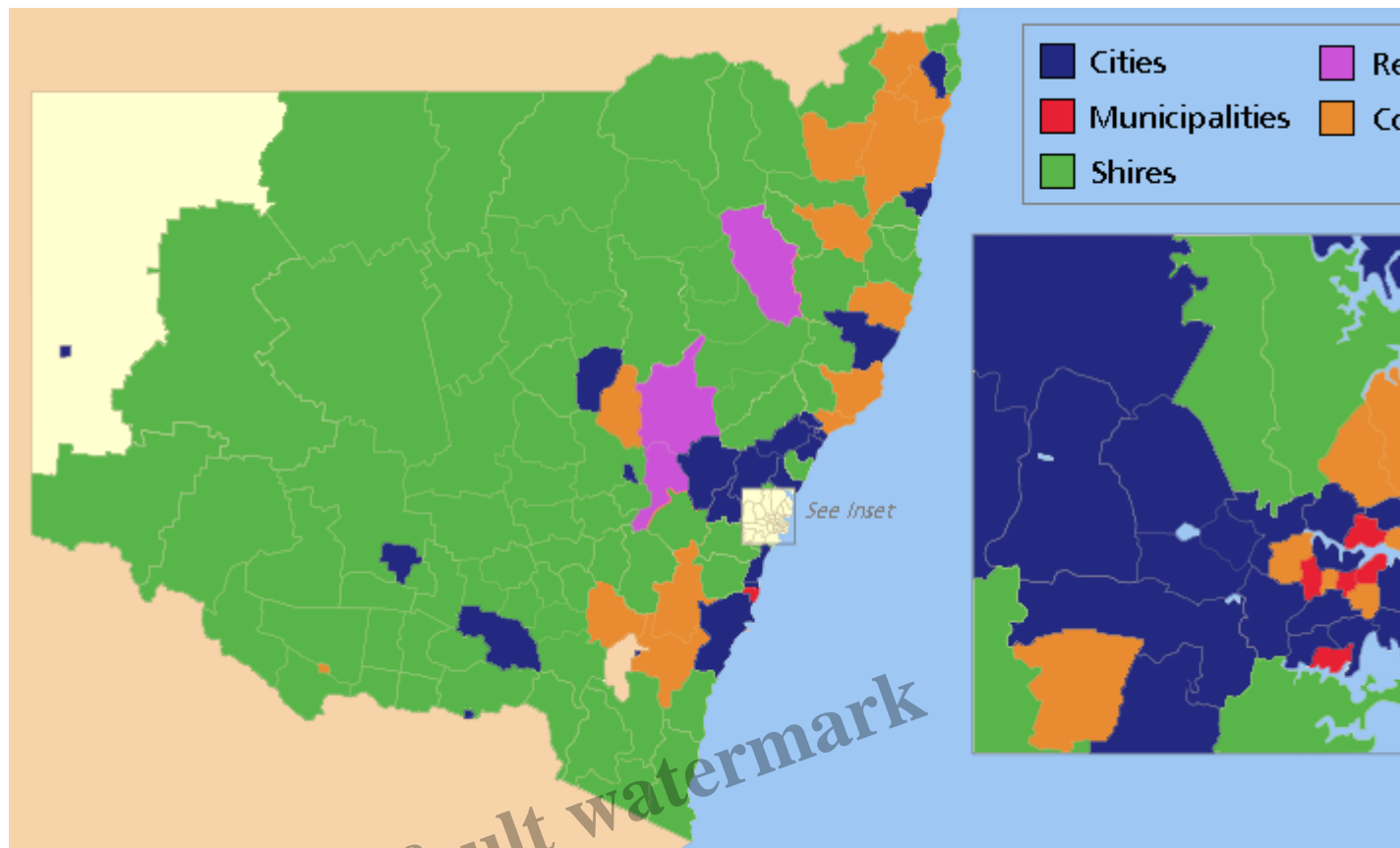
Is the Hawkesbury a Shire or are we a City?

Description

I still remember that when I was a kid in 1989, “Hawkesbury Shire Council” [changed its name](#) to “Hawkesbury City Council”.

I wondered then, as I do now, why we bothered. It seemed a pointless gesture which worked actively against the identity most locals held about the area. I believe it sprang from an erroneous sense of inadequacy, and that we lost nothing by continuing to be known as a Shire.

Did you know the word *Shire* is a Saxon word, whereas *County* is its Norman equivalent? And a *city*, as our late Mayor Rex Stubbs used to explain to me, was a “town large enough to have its main church called a cathedral”. Despite Rex’s romantic penchant for referring to our historic St Matthew’s church ([this year celebrating its bicentenary!](#)) as the “Cathedral of the Hawkesbury”, I’m afraid I just don’t buy it. We don’t have to be a city. Let’s look at some numbers.



Types of Council across NSW. ([Source](#))

There are (subject to the ongoing vagaries of the [Council amalgamation process](#)), presently [128 Councils in NSW](#). The City of Hawkesbury has a population of 66,134 (per [2015 ABS Statistics](#)). It's just a fact that plenty of Councils bigger than us are perfectly happy to continue to be known as "Shires", even when given recent opportunities to re-name. Look at Hornsby Shire (population: 156,847), Hills Shire Council (169,872), or Sutherland Shire (210,863). The latter is three times our size, and they feel no need to "upgrade". And no-one could accuse our near neighbour in The Hills Shire for being less dynamic or future-oriented. Further, their adherence to the word *Shire* is not an anachronism, considering they had the opportunity to re-brand themselves as a "city" when they changed from "Baulkham Hills Shire Council" (a name in use [since 1906](#)) to "The Hills Shire Council" in November 2008. And look at that area now!

I've always held the belief that the word "Shire" was more pleasant than "City", both for its ancient linguistic roots, but also its evocation of bucolic, open spaces.

The term *Shire*, in our case, used to reflect the fact that we were precisely *not* a bustling, congested, urbanised polis. We lay... between. We were between Sydney city proper and the country. The trendy term now in use is "peri-urban", but I find this to be a little pretentious. One could speculate that Tolkien would never have used such a Newspeak word when trying to evoke his sylvan idyll. The [recent process I engaged in to draft our new Community Strategic Plan](#) underlined that what we aspire to as our identity is largely defined by our semi-rural aspect. Our mix of habitation, agriculture, and protected environmental spaces is well described with the word "Shire". The word "City" just seems to convey the opposite to me, and, considering our population and neighbours who don't use the word, makes us

look more than a little self-conscious.

Should the Hawkesbury remain as a City, or go back to our old name of “Hawkesbury Shire”? I think we should, even while I acknowledge that there is probably little appetite for the change. Further, there would be the cost of changing all our signage, letterheads and other livery — and I would absolutely oppose that needless expense while we have more important matters to attend to as we pursue long term financial sustainability as a Council.

What do you think? I’m interested in knowing.

Here’s a timeline of the naming of our municipality:

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The History of Hawkesbury Councils in NSW

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. Development
2. Hawkesbury Council
3. Hawkesbury Shire
4. Hawkesbury City

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