



10 May 2021

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The Hon. Shelley Hancock, MP
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Dear Minister Hancock

In accordance with the provisions of S438N of the *Local Government Act 1993* this report is submitted in relation to Wingecarribee Shire Council for your consideration.

Since my appointment as Interim Administrator, all suspended Councillors have been interviewed together with former Councillors, Turland and Halstead and a number of staff. I have met with all State and Federal Members and am now undertaking individual tours at many villages to get a better understanding of residents' views and concerns. It is a demanding undertaking but very worthwhile with a consistent theme that the Council lacks transparency and had stopped listening.

At my first meeting at the Council I gave notice that an independent desktop review of the Council's financial position, resourcing strategy, maintenance of basic infrastructure, depreciation schedules and capacity to deliver projects identified in the Community Strategic Plan would be undertaken. In addition, a governance, human resources and statutory obligations audit would also be commissioned.

These reports have now been received and while no concerns are flagged in relation to Council's general financial position, both reports highlight governance short comings and recommendations that must be addressed. Both reports have been forwarded to the Office of Local Government and a further independent report relating to development issues at the Council is nearing completion and will also be forwarded.

There is no question in my mind that there is much to be done to restore the community's confidence in Wingecarribee Shire Council. The elected body and the former executive of the Council showed a complete disregard for the community they were elected and employed to serve. A lack of respect, transparency and communication has led to constant suspicion of decision-making processes and there is much evidence that Council had simply stopped listening. It is my view that the executive of the Council were providing favored information to some members and this has not helped to address behavioral issues at Council and the effectiveness of Council decision making.

Working with you

The Wingecarribee Shire community has lost trust in their elected representatives and a lack of leadership in the governing body and executive staff has severely impacted on the health and safety of many staff. The executive staff have now all left the Council and this provides the opportunity, following the appointment of a new General Manager, to restructure the organisation as, in my view, it is presently both cumbersome and complex. Roles at both the elected and operational areas are just not understood and from a resident's point of view, very difficult to navigate.

At the Council meeting held on 21 April 2021, I foreshadowed that I would be seeking an extension of three months to my appointment. It is important that the Wingecarribee Shire community has renewed confidence and trust in the Council before the September 2021 elections.

Additionally, as stated earlier, elected members have lost the confidence of the community and there are a number of matters that need open, honest and transparent review before an elected body is returned. I am very concerned that if this does not happen the September elections will be drowned by the past controversial issues at the expense of the community.

Suspended Councillors in my view do not warrant return to Council office and should they so desire can present for re-election in September 2021. Clearly their behavior has been dysfunctional, and coalitions of convenience have been formed and together with the former executive were an embarrassment to and a poor example of good local government.

In a short time, much needs to be done to restore the proper and effective functioning of Wingecarribee Shire Council. Council has failed the community it was meant to serve in the exercise of many of its statutory functions, but principally decision making and community participation.

Accordingly, I now formally recommend that you consider extending my appointment until the September 2021 elections.

I would also take this opportunity of acknowledging the work of the Acting General Manager, Mr Les McMahon. The elected Council and its former executive have overseen a deterioration of its work, health and safety issues and Mr McMahon has started to address this toxic culture and together we are preparing for the arrival of a new General Manager and restructure to provide the organisation a much greater emphasis on strategic and community planning and Council needs to work with what I consider to be a very engaged community which should be seen by Council as a positive not a negative.

Wingecarribee Shire Council in my view has failed its community and needs a fresh start at the September 2021 elections that focuses on the fundamentals of sound local government, not perceived entitlement, ego and personality. This will ensure that Wingecarribee Shire Council will be an effective and well-respected Council into the future.

Yours sincerely



Viv May PSM
Interim Administrator