



Community Update

Reference: 101; 102; 103/6
Report Author: Interim Administrator

Since the last meeting of Council, I have attended a range of meetings to address legacy issues and have been working with the General Manager to take the Council forward.

We continue to rebuild Councils' relationships with other local authorities, state and federal government departments and agencies.

With Council set to commence its community consultation program regarding the provision of potable water to the northern and southern villages it was opportune in late April to have a visit by senior staff of Regional Water Strategies, Department of Planning and Environment.

I joined Council's acting Group Manager Water and Sewer in visiting Balmoral, Buxton, Penrose and Wingello. Following these site visits we returned to the Council Administration building and were joined by the General Manager, where we had constructive discussions on funding opportunities and the Council's projected expenditure over the next four years of \$189M on water and sewerage renewals and upgrades.

The continuing effect of El Nino wet weather is seriously damaging the Council's already deteriorating road infrastructure. Council staff are doing an excellent job however the weather is proving problematic with consistent rain periods making it difficult to undertake the required works. Let me be clear in saying this, that it is a major problem for metropolitan, regional and rural councils given the unprecedented weather conditions

I am conscious that the administrative staff have had extra workloads created by the many vacancies within our organisation, demands of the Public Inquiry, preparation of the 2022/23 Draft Operational Plan and Budget and not to mention other day to day activities, and as such the report back on the review of the Asset Management Plans that were relied on when Council made its submissions on the government's Fit for the Future Reforms and the 2015 Special Rate Variation Application has been delayed. I am repeatedly told that Council built expectations with its 45.3% cumulative rate increase and, with a new CFO now on board, rather than go to consultants I am sure the community would be happy to have his views on the matter. I note that Council at its meeting in February 2013 resolved to "apply for an SRV to reduce infrastructure backlogs and achieve sustainability indicators set by the NSW state government's Fit for the Future Local Government Reform Program".

The Quarterly Review of the Operational Plan 2021/22 and Budget listed for consideration today notes that approximately 13,000 potholes were attended to on Shire roads in the last quarter. An extra \$1.3M is provided in the draft 2022/23 Budget for an extra "pothole gang" and as I have no intention of varying that allocation I have asked the General Manager to start the recruitment and procure the necessary capital purchases to ensure a 1 July start.

The Wingecarribee Shire Council Public Inquiry concluded its public hearings on 28 April 2022 and, in accordance with the Commissioner's directions, Counsel Assisting provided his final

AGENDA FOR THE ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

Wednesday 18 May 2022

INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR MINUTE



written submissions on 9 May. The directions of the Commissioner also stated that persons who consider that they are directly affected by the Inquiry's Terms of Reference and evidence given during the public hearings may make final written submissions, including any submission that responds to the submissions made by the Counsel Assisting by 23 May.

I gave evidence in the Inquiry on 5 April and was afforded the opportunity to formally respond to an email submitted to the Inquiry on 27 April. The transcript of my evidence and response to the email are publicly available on the Office of Local Government Public Inquiry website and I am satisfied that I have been afforded ample opportunity by both the Commissioner and Counsel Assisting to address not only my submission to the Inquiry, but my two reports submitted to the former Minister for Local Government. In the circumstances I will not be making any further submissions. The General Manager and I have discussed whether the governing body of Council should make a submission and we have agreed it would not be appropriate.

On a number of occasions, I have raised concerns about the perceived need for residents, particularly in the development area, to retain former council employees apparently on the basis of having to do so to navigate the Council's so-called complex processes. In my view this is not a practice that promotes probity and good governance and may lead to unnecessary community perceptions promoting the need to do so to achieve positive outcomes. I am conscious that the General Manager is taking all actions within her control to assure residents that they do not need, what I call "bureaucracy busters" and that they should rely on the professionalism and integrity of current employees. In addition, the Wingecarribee Planning Panel established in 2021 adds another layer of independence and confidence in process.

It is my strong view that the industry Standard Contract for General Managers and Senior Staff should be amended to provide that former employees cannot provide consultancy services to the Council in which they were employed for three years in a similar vein to private sector non-compete clause.

To put a stop to this practice, which I consider to be expensive to residents and completely unnecessary, I have asked the General Manager to investigate the possibility of the Council maintaining a public register of third-party contact by former employees and the possibility of ensuring any matter with a former employee involvement is only dealt with by an employee who did not work with that person directly previously. This suggestion should not be taken to in any way question the integrity or professionalism of employees or former employees it is simply to ensure openness and transparency.

Viv May PSM

Interim Administrator