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## Community Update

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

The recent storms which caused substantial flooding and damage to both private and public infrastructure in the Shire, show yet again that we are living in an environmentally changing world. In my visits to affected areas there was one common theme from residents - we have lived through this before, but never this bad.

In times of emergency, you can always count on the volunteers from the SES and RFS to be on the ground quickly and they were. The Police and Fire and Rescue also responded and in my view, the coordination was first class.

I would also like to make mention of the Council employees who worked very hard to ensure that our services were maintained and who with the above mentioned, spent many hours addressing issues and call outs from residents.

Storm events like what have just occurred, are coordinated by the SES, who having regard to the forecast for Monday the 7 March, had already activated their incident management plan. Importantly Council also played a key role in the plan and I am told by the SES Commander that he was very happy with Council's response on the day and following.

Together with Resilience NSW and Transport NSW, Council has now moved to the recovery and a clean-up stage the area has been declared a Natural Disaster. I would encourage residents who are experiencing issues to contact Council's Recovery Hotline or visit the Community Hub located at the Civic Centre. If you know of someone who you think the Council could or should help, please let us know, as Council staff are also door knocking.

I am even more determined to ensure that both the SES and NSW RFS have the facilities and resources needed to do their jobs properly and this includes a new SES building at Moss Vale and water tanks across the Shire for the RFS.

Yesterday I joined a Teams meeting initiated by the Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories Hon Nola Marino MP, to specifically address the effect on the Southern Highlands when Council employees, representatives of Business together with SES leadership were given a very good hearing. Council was able to reinforce the effect of the storms on its already deteriorating road network and the President, Business Southern Highlands was able to advocate on behalf of businesses across the Highlands, in particular Robertson and Burrawang who are in affect isolated from the closure of Illawarra Highway. It was devastating to hear the President, Wine NSW saying that the 45 wine growers across the region have in affect lost another vintage. Residents, business owners and primary producers are assured that the Council will continue to advocate with both State and Federal Governments on your behalf.

On a negative side, I was extremely disappointed to be told that some of the Council staff who were responding to the call-outs, in particular, to pot holes, were abused by a very small minority of people on the state of Council roads. Let me be clear, they are not at fault and they are just doing their job and deserve better.

## AGENDA FOR THE ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

Wednesday 16 March 2022

### INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR MINUTE



A report on legacy issues relating to roads, was presented at the last Council meeting and I have already flagged that there will be significant additional resources in the 2022/23 budget allocated to pot holes. We are listening and being open, honest and transparent about the problem - but it's not the fault of those who are out in the storms addressing emergency situations.

In December 2021, IPART announced that the baseline rate peg for 2022/23 had been set at 0.7% and Wingecarribee was allocated an additional 0.5% growth factor bringing the total reg peg to 1.2%. In my view the determination of IPART was unrealistic and would heavily impact on the Council's 10 year adopted plans which provide an annual 2% increase. The decision compares with the consumer price index for 2021 of 3.5%.

As the lowest rate peg in two decades this would have enormous impact on Council's ability to deliver works and services requested by the community and adopted in the Delivery and Operational Plans.

At a time when Council is working to drive community recovery from COVID and natural disasters, and to improve local infrastructure such as roads, it is necessary to ensure that Council generates sufficient income to meet these needs.

I have already flagged that in my view that Council's priorities do not reflect the community's expectations, and this has been earlier verified in community surveys. A reset in priorities is required and I am still awaiting the finalisations of an independent report I requested, comparing the valuation of Council's Assets, it's Fit For the Future response and the earlier special rate variation.

On 7 March 2022, IPART announced an additional round of Special Variation applications for councils that can demonstrate the need for a special variation to meet the obligations they set for 2022/23 in their Integrated Planning and Reporting documentation, specifically the Long-Term Financial Plan.

If Council applies and is successful for a special variation for the difference between the IPART announcement (that is 1.2%) and what has been planned within the Long Term Financial Plan (that is 2%), this would generate additional income of approximately \$425,000. Importantly, if the Council was not to make such an application, loss revenue over the 10-year planning cycle would be \$4.85M.

It is expected that IPART will provide detailed guidance on the application process and submission details by the end of March 2022 and that applications will be accepted until 29 April 2022. IPART intends to enable at least three weeks of community consultation prior to notifying councils of its decision no later than 21 June 2022.

Accordingly, I recommend:

#### **THAT**

- 1. Council prepare and submit an application for a permanent additional Special Variation of 0.8% under section 508(2) of the Local Government Act 1993**
- 2. Council notes that the 0.8% estimated additional income it will receive if the special variation is approved is approximately \$425,000 and is already factored into the Council's adopted Long Term Financial Plan.**
- 3. Council confirms that the additional special variation is required to meet the obligations set out in Council's adopted Integrated Planning and Reporting documents and that if not supported will require a reduction in service levels.**
- 4. Council confirms that the impact on ratepayers has been considered as part of budget preparation for 2022-23 and future years and considers that the benefits to the community outweigh the impacts of additional income.**

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I attended the LGNSW Water Management Conference in Narrabri between the 9 and 11 February 2022, together with the Director of Communities and Place, Geoff King and Graeme Mellor Manager of Water and Sewer.

There were a number of interesting presentations, site visits and opportunities for networking. Both relevant spokesman's for government and opposition parties addressed the conference.

I was fortunate to spend time with the Resilience Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and Jim Bentley, CEO of the NSW Water Sector and some of his team. The Commissioner is well aware of the problems that confront Wingecarribee Shire Council, due to the lack of preparations at the Civic level and the failures that followed the 2019/20 Black Summer Fires and he indicated that he was prepared to visit the Southern Highlands to facilitate direct dialogue and undertake site visits. However, this may now be delayed due to the flooding in Northern NSW.

We are moving to address the identified issues with emergency responses and to that end, our Local Member, the Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP has arranged a meeting with the Minister of Emergency Services, at Parliament House Sydney early next week.

Mr Bentley gave a wide-ranging presentation that addressed, the question of Smart Meters for both mains and private connection and has now facilitated for us officer level meetings at the highest levels of the State Government. In addition, the provision of water to both the southern and northern Villages has been talked about for too long at Council and its now time for action. It's going to be costly, but to have any chance of being successful with grant applications, Council needs to have at least scoped the opportunities and documented and endorsed concept plans. I am firmly of the belief the Council has the professional staff to just get on with this, in addition to the already heavy work schedule required for sewer upgrades as reported to the February meeting.

The availability of 200 State Government funded upskilling job opportunities in the Water and Sewer area was also of particular interest to me and I am encouraging the General Manager to follow up on this initiative to hopefully provide an opportunity for some our own employees.

Several items on today's business paper again highlight the complexity of the many issues that confront the Council, in particular the failure of successive councils to address land planning issues strategically.

I have repeatedly stated that residents need to control the future of the area and its apparent from residents and staff that this has not been happening. The new suburb of Ashbourne is a prime example and while it would have been better if the report by the Director of Communities and Place was available for this meeting, I agree that it is essential that what is reported, is correct. I am told that how the whole matter has been handled by the State and Council is quite simply cog mire – thou it's just one of many legacy planning issues Council staff are addressing.

It is important when a new Council is elected, that they can hit the ground running. Openness and transparency in the community and consulting (and listening!) to residents are key pillars of the reset of Council. I have asked the General Manager to report to the May meeting of Council of the opportunities, to ensure that there are stakeholder opportunities for input in the many issues being addressed. Such report is to explore the possible greater use of community members on local

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planning panel (if appropriate) as an advisory group to assist consultants, staff and myself in coming to good community driven and supported outcomes.

Together, with the General Manager I attended the special LG NSW Conference on the 28 February and 1 March in Sydney, together with representative from most Councils from across the State. A number of politicians addressed the conference, including the Hon Wendy Tuckerman, Minister of Local Government. Nearly 100 motions were debated at conference.

Councils motion to conference.....

**THAT** Local Government NSW leads, and resources, advocacy for better outcomes in street lighting for member Councils – in particular to assist smaller regional Councils to share information and more effectively manage arrangements with Distributed Network Service Providers.

It was supported in an overriding motion, proposed by Yass Valley seeking LG NSW to commit to leading and resourcing an advocacy program on street lighting across the State. Just because a motion is successful at conference does not mean that its actioned immediately or becomes law and no doubt more information on this matter will come to Council through meetings of the Canberra Region Joint Organisation.

I would move:

That the Minute be noted, and the recommendations contained therein be adopted.

Viv May PSM

**Interim Administrator**