
Administrator Minute

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Report Author: Administrator

After a period of COVID enforced absence, Australia Day returned to Berrima this year when I was honoured to present Australian Citizenship to 64 citizens from a myriad of countries around the globe.

It was a wonderful ceremony, following which our Ambassador Mel Thomas gave a heartfelt presentation on her life experience dealing with domestic violence, which led her to founding KYUP! Project. This was not Mel's first visit to the Shire as she had previously visited Mittagong to run free female self-defence workshops.

During the ceremony, announcements were made in relation to Australia Day nominations, and I had great pleasure in announcing Mr John Creighton as our 2023 Citizen of the Year.

John was joined by his wife and family and the citation noted his commitment to providing care and protection to native wildlife with a focus on wombat mange treatment.

Mr Hugh Clarke was nominated for Citizen of the Year for achieving new legislation that will give farmers and producers resilience against all calamity and his work in the Shire is also much appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the local recipients of National Australia Day Honours as follows:

- Robert Barrett OAM for his service the community through a range of roles
- Winsome Hall OAM for her service to the community through a range of roles
- Gregory Hobart OAM for his service to the community through a range of roles.

The assistance of the Berrima Community and Council staff in pulling together at relatively short notice our Berrima Australia Day activities is recognised with gratitude. Unfortunately, in mid-November, the previous organiser of the event indicated he did not wish to continue in the wake of several tough years and the parade not going ahead.

Upon closer examination on what had been arranged in the years before COVID, it became obvious that statutory obligations in relation to the planning of such events had not been appropriately followed and as time did not permit the necessary approvals, I agreed with the staff decision that the exposure to risk was not in the community interest.

I know that not all residents were happy with the decisions relating to this year's celebrations, and I am in receipt of several complaints and have invited those people to join in the consultations for planning next year's activities.

The celebration that did occur was excellent and in keeping with the Berrima communities wishes, that stalls and pop ups be from the Shire only giving it a true flavour of local community. In the words of the former president of the Berrima Residents Association, Eric Savage *"From walking through the village and talking to people it was clear the day was a*

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great success for visitors as well as businesses. Feedback was very positive. The vibe was great and the experience will prove a good basis for planning next year's event."

By way of observation, I would note that it is often raised with me that when markets are held, a large number of stall holders appear to come from Greater Sydney, and while it is not Council's role to interfere, in such decisions, they are hardly opportunities to present the excellent array of locally made goods and services, not to mention our fantastic agricultural products.

Whilst improvements have been made in Council's communication and engagement, as part of the reset of the organisation there is still much more to do. There have recently been improvements to the weekly e-news as well as a regular Council update in the local print media and radio news. This will continue to be an area of focus of the General Manager. Over the next few months you will also see consultations taking place in Bowral with the Bowral Town Centre Master plan commencing and in Robertson as the staff undertake consultation on the draft Robertson Place Plan. The website will also be updated in the next few months to make it easier to find out about what is on and what is happening in the local area. This is a work in progress as the General Manager leads Council's team to implement the Road Map to reset the organisation. 2023 reflects year two, of a three year program of Back to Basics.

Wingecarribee is no different to most Council's in that it relies on the time generosity of volunteers who come together in many forms whether it be through community or service organisations, sporting and arts and culture.

The Shire's community deserves a readily accessible and up to date organisation manual that provides contact details for organisations across the entire area. This will also allow a ready reference for the many and varied consultations that the Council undertakes. To that end I have asked the General Manager to ensure that there is an appropriate allocation in the 2023/24 budget that ensures such a document is available by the end of the year. There are numerous examples in other Councils that in my view will make a quantum improvement to our suite of communication strategies.

I have now taken the view that the management of S355A Committees by Council's administration has been adhoc at best and this has led to a complexity that has failed volunteers whose contributions to their communities have not been properly valued, respected or recognised.

Having said that, the Council has statutory obligations not only to protect the corporate body but the volunteers who give so freely of their time. Following the deferral of the David Ackroyd report at the October 2022 meeting, my request for further information has led me to the conclusion that the adopted S355A committee volunteer management manual - 2016 has been basically ignored. This should not be taken as a criticism of everybody as it is a wordy, complex and conflicting document.

We need a fresh start and to be very clear that does not mean abandoning the committees, but professionally supporting them in a common sense and consistent way. I have been advised by the General Manager that a plain English manual is being prepared to ensure that

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Council staff and members of the 355A Committees are aware of the responsibilities and accountabilities required through the delegation of Council functions to volunteers. Once the Manual has been finalised this will be used as the basis of an annual training session.

The General Manager has advised that when Council goes to tender for its insurances, opportunities to simplify insurances will also be included so that there is a level playing field whether a Committee or Council officers do the bookings.

The question of Council's signatories on 355A committee accounts is a matter that will require further direction from the General Manager in consultation with our industry obligations from the Office of Local Government, NSW Audit Office and the Council's own Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC).

Council has been talking for too long about improvements for community groups and I would hope that the centralised booking service, (which I note was contained in a Council resolution in 2016) is actually introduced before the end of the year.

As previously flagged, I have started meeting with Section 355A Committees and at Penrose last week, discussions took place as to what happens with the existing hall when the new facility opens later this year. It was agreed at the meeting that Council should develop, in consultation with the Penrose Community (which means not only the committee and resident association but all residents), an expression of interest document for the future of the building. The Committee acknowledge that there has been considerable expenditure on the hall over the last few years and that as a new hall coming into councils' ownership it is unrealistic to expect it will fund the maintenance of both.

Another matter that has been occasionally raised with me, but again at the recent Hill Top meeting, is appropriate entry signs to the Shire on the motorway, highways and local roads. This is a matter that will require considerable consultation and professional assistance to ensure that they truly recognise the unique environment that so many residents call home. I have indicated to those who have approached me, that this is a matter best left to the September 2024 incoming Council, and I have asked the General Manager to ensure that it is included in the community strategic plan consideration in conjunction with the 2025/26 budget.

I was advised on Friday, of the decision of the Wingecarribee leader of the State Emergency Services to stand down from his position after seven years. Warren Turner, like so many in our community has given so much in the service of others.

As we all know, whether it be flooding, wind events, flyers, COVID or any other catastrophe, SES and RFS volunteers are quickly on the scene. In Warren's case, it was his voice of common sense for me with the SES and his advocacy that made me realise we had to do something urgently for the Moss Vale volunteers and hopefully their new facility (which will bring with it new and more appropriate state government funded vehicles) will be finished this time next year.

It is a coincidence that I had been discussing with the General Manager what would be an appropriate opportunity for the Council to acknowledge voluntary local first responder

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leadership, and later in the year an appropriate gathering will be held to acknowledge Warren's work and that of the leadership of the other SES and RFS units across the Shire.

Viv May PSM

Administrator