
Community Update

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

Submissions to the Wingecarribee Shire Council Public Inquiry closed on 29 October and as I have previously advised I made a submission in my capacity as Interim Administrator.

It is noted from the Commissioner's Information Paper that it is not his intention to publish submissions to the Inquiry.

While respecting that decision it is my view that as the Council is under Administration, it is in the public interest that my submission be made available and accordingly I table same.

Congratulations are again due to Berrima for winning Gold in Australia's Small Tourism Town Awards. The national awards celebrate towns and regions across the country that demonstrate outstanding commitment to encouraging tourism and increasing visitation to their destination. On top of winning the State award in May this is quite an achievement.

There has been considerable resident concern and media coverage in relation to the future of the Berrima Gaol and it is my intention to adopt the recommendation presented on this business paper in relation to the matter. For the record I would advise that I have been approached by two groups – one community based, the other a potential purchaser seeking support from Council. Both have been advised, as have all other approaches, of the details contained in the letter to the State Member, and as Council will in effect need to be the planning authority, are unable to provide any other information. It is regretted that to some degree the local community has now been excluded from the first stage of this very important process. This is very disappointing and places the Council in an awkward position having regard to its statutory obligations.

I am conscious there are discussions and observations in the Shire in relation to recent personnel changes at the Mittagong Visitor Centre – also known as Destination Southern Highlands. In fairness it is both negative and positive.

While branded under different names, the Mittagong Visitor Centre is an arm (and financed by ratepayers) of the Council under the direction of the General Manager and in my view has lost its direction and relevance. The potential of the visitor economy is not being maximised or the economic benefit realised.

I have held discussions with the General Manager that a new model needs to be developed in consultation, not only with industry and government stakeholders, but importantly residents. A model that taps into the proud tradition of volunteering in the Southern

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Highlands and has a presence at community organised events. In other words, the Visitor Centre should be a significant economic driver that is run under the authority of Council with employees working in partnership with stakeholder groups and residents. Options are still being worked through but there will be community based involvement before a final decision is taken.

Inter-allotment drainage is essentially a private matter. Since I have been the Interim Administrator I have had a number of approaches from residents and there appears to be a lack of consistency and confusion on the part of the Council administration in relation to Council's ability to take action. It is clear that Council can serve notices but history shows it appears to have been loath to become involved. It should not be necessary for the Council to become a neighbour referee but I have asked the General Manager to arrange for an intervention policy on inter-allotment drainage to be developed so everyone is on the same page.

In my opinion Council should only become involved if overland flows affect habitable dwellings as distinct from what are sometimes former water paths or natural water courses but I am happy to leave this to the professionals for a report to Council in the new year.

A meeting was held last week with representatives of the Ngununggula Gallery in the Retford Park Estate Bowral. Those responsible for the establishment of the Gallery are to be congratulated and it is a credit to them that what has been built has been done without any injection of ratepayer's funds. The operation of the Gallery is a different matter and Council has committed \$2.5m over five years of which \$1m has already been paid.

The Gallery would like to see the Council's contribution increased but I advised them that this would be a question for the incoming Council as I do not feel I have a mandate to become involved. I acknowledge the position of the Gallery in that major exhibitions cost a lot of money and are years in the making and there is no legal agreement, even for the \$2.5m commitment from the Council that contributions will continue. I understand the situation but am also of the view that ratepayers, through their local Council, should be represented on the Board and I have asked the General Manager to report to Council as soon as practicable on guaranteeing funding for a certain number of years and to discuss with the Board an appropriate Council representative also taking their place at the table.

Notice has been given that an Extraordinary Meeting of Council will be held on 24 November to deal with the Council's audited financial statements, the quarterly financial review to the end of September, and other matters that the General Manager would like listed. The Chair of Council's Audit, Risk & Improvement Committee, Mr Stephen Horne, has also asked to address Council.

The General Manager has raised her concerns at the length of time that it takes Wingecarribee Shire Council to get its quarterly financial statements to a Council meeting and to address this issue I understand a report will be coming to the December 2021

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meeting to have monthly Council meetings moved to the third Wednesday in the future. This is a sensible outcome.

I attended the Canberra Regional Joint Organisation (CRJO) Board meeting with the General Manager on Friday 29 October in Canberra.

The CRJO Board meeting provided the opportunity to discuss and plan as a region. At a regional level, there are many opportunities for Wingecarribee Shire Council, in particular, to take advantage of a Regional Community Strategic Plan. Whilst Wingecarribee Shire Council declined to participate in this project initially, I have asked the General Manager to explore how Council can leverage off this work. The Regional Community Strategic Plan provides insights to the region and will be important to regional advocacy and each participating Council will also have access to a suite of collateral including discussion guides, surveys, drawing sheets and material to support pop-up engagements for individual local government area Community Strategic Plans.

Other activities of the CRJO include the formation of the water utilities group to support informal information between local water utility managers and identify emergent risks that have impacted on local water utilities/Councils during recent emergency situations like acute drought, fires and floods.

The Minutes of the CRJO meeting together with those of the Country Mayors Association meeting, which I attended on 5 November 2021, will be listed at the next meeting of Council.

Viv May PSM

Interim Administrator