



Community Update

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

The recent prolonged rain event that impacted Queensland and NSW reached our Shire, starting last Tuesday 16 March and has now eased. Rainfall recorded in Bowral topped 250mm whilst Moss Vale recorded only 120mm.

Council is currently awaiting the outcome of its application to Resilience NSW to have our Shire included in the Natural Disaster Declaration.

The rain event has kept Council crews, SES, Police, Endeavour Energy and other agencies extremely busy working around the clock attending to dozens of fallen trees which had blocked roads, sometimes bringing down power lines and water blocking roads. On behalf of the Wingecarribee community, I thank them all.

The saturated roads resulted in hundreds of potholes which will take Council crews weeks to repair. Road users need to be especially cautious and patient now and in the next few weeks whilst road repairs are being undertaken and fallen trees are being removed from roadsides.

A big thank you, on behalf of the community is due to Council's wonderful crews, support staff and Customer Services staff who have worked tirelessly in maintaining important services to our community and endeavouring to re-open roads safely and with minimal delay. On a personal note, could I thank those who provided me with very detailed and professional status briefings.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome and thank Mr Les McMahon for taking on the role of Acting General Manager for the next couple of months. As I said previously 'fresh eyes' will be important for the Council Administration as we work to restore the proper and effective functioning of the Council as generally outlined in the Minister for Local Government's correspondence of 2 March 2021.

The recruitment of a new General Manager is a priority and the advertising for the position has been reopened until Tuesday, 6 April 2021. I am now seeking two community representatives to assist in the selection process and residents are encouraged to put their name forward. As I said earlier, suspended and former Councillors and candidates for Local Government election, past and prospective, will not be considered. There will be a considerable amount of reading and the need for complete confidentiality and in the circumstances, as the process may take a couple of days and in fairness, a stipend will be offered.

Interested residents should forward me their details and in a few words advising their experience in such matters and what they believe should be the attributes from a community perspective for the new General Manager.

AGENDA FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

Wednesday 24 March 2021

INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR MINUTE



The Selection Panel will consist of four people and be facilitated by LGNSW and Mr John Rayner, the former long serving General Manager of Sutherland Shire Council and currently the Special Advisor and Financial Controller of Armidale Regional Council, has agreed to assist in the process. No Wingecarribee Shire Council personnel, including the Acting General Manager, will be involved.

The staff are thanked for pulling together so quickly an Interim Advisory Planning and Assessment Panel. I will be moving an amendment to the recommendation for the Panel to have determination powers for Development Applications for its first meeting.

I have asked the Acting General Manager to immediately commence the process of expanding the community representation base of the Panel so there is a bigger pool that hopefully covers all areas of the Shire.

In my Minute to the 17 March meeting in relation to the introduction of a Panel, I noted the actions would assist in validating or exposing the professionalism and competence of planning staff. It has now been brought to my attention that there is local commentary on the fact that residents will no longer have 'advocacy' from Councillors, in my view this is not correct.

In my short time here, I have taken an early view that there appears to be some blurring by elected officials and Council staff on their respective roles and responsibilities. The *Local Government Act* is very clear in Section 232 of the roles of a Councillor, one of which states inter alia:

(d) to represent the collective interests of residents, ratepayers and the local community.

Residents will be able to make personal representation to the Panel and no doubt some will also be represented by professionals. Nothing stops a Councillor also appearing, recognising their Section 232 Statutory obligations. Even a suspended Councillor can appear if they are not exercising any of the functions of Civic Office.

I alluded previously to the fact that I am being approached by residents and staff about the operations of Council and I would encourage people to come forward in that regard. Some people are not very happy and the Planning section in particular and development application assessment appears to be a consistent theme. In consultation with the Acting General Manager the decision has now been taken to have an independent consultant review the effectiveness of the Council's overall planning, development and compliance functions and processes. A brief is being prepared that will include the opportunity for residents to speak directly on a confidential basis to the selected consultant. Residents who are writing to me with concerns will be directed to the consultant who will have the necessary expertise, experience and qualifications to give constructive comment.

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I wish to make it very clear that the decision to allow direct access should not be seen as an opportunity to re-open already determined matters, nor will the consultant become involved in the assessment of matters presently before Council.

In my role as Interim Administrator I have an obligation to submit a report to the Minister about my administration of the Council which is to include any recommendations in relation to improving or restoring the proper and effective functioning of the Council. This report is to be provided to the Minister no less than 14 days before the end of the suspension period.

To assist me in coming to an informed conclusion, I think it necessary to visit all towns and villages in the Shire to consult locally with any resident who may wish to do so. While this will be time consuming I consider it essential. The staff are presently planning visits that will be held in mid-April to early May and ample notice will be given of location and dates to enable residents to make appointments. If it is considered necessary for the visits to be held at night, I will be only too happy to do so as it is important that all views are considered.

Finally, I would advise that Council's normal office hours will revert to 8:30am to 4:30pm effective from Monday, 29 March 2021 following the continued easing of COVID-19 restrictions by the NSW Government. I have asked the Acting General Manager to liaise with staff to see if it is possible in the future for the offices to close at 5:00pm in line with normal business operating hours.

Recommendation

I move that this minute be received and noted.

Viv May PSM

Interim Administrator