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## Community Update

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

The decision of the Minister for Local Government to hold a Public Inquiry into Wingecarribee Shire Council is welcomed.

Tabled for the record are:

- i. Copy of letter from Minister for Local Government to Interim Administrator dated 31 August 2021
- ii. Government gazette notice – No. 424 – Local Government dated 1 September 2021

While I issued a statement last Friday it is important for the Council record that what was said is read into the Minutes.

Credit for the Minister's decision must go to the many residents who worked tirelessly to expose the perceived failures of both the elected body and former executive and the arrogance of some who did not follow their clearly stated guiding principles and responsibilities in relation to exercise of functions generally, decision making and community participation.

In my outreach visits residents and organisations placed their trust and confidence in me and it was from this honest and frank dialogue that many of my actions and conclusions were drawn.

I would also like to acknowledge the openness of staff in exposing issues and for their assistance with the independent reviews and audits. I am very conscious of the fact that there are many vacancies in the organisation and the extra demands of working in a COVID-19 world. Be assured that you have contributed to Wingecarribee Shire Council being a much better place in which to work and becoming an employer of choice.

The Council not listening was a feature of the past. The voice of the community has now been heard and the Minister for Local Government has acted.

On a personal note I am determined to see this through and thank the Minister for her confidence in my reappointment.

While undertaking my statutory role without fear or favour, I am committed to supporting the General Manager as she builds a professional organisation in which the Shire's community can have confidence, respect and trust.

## AGENDA FOR THE ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

Wednesday 8 September 2021

### INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR MINUTE



Importantly, when elections are held, Councillors will be able to develop a strong partnership with an Administration providing clear, transparent and consistent advice.

Residents, ratepayers and staff may be assured of your Council's total co-operation with the Public Inquiry and when the call for submissions is released, and if you have an experience that will assist (and I have heard so many), I encourage you to come forward.

Following the gazettal of the Public Inquiry on Friday, the General Manager arranged for the Council website to have an alert followed very shortly after with a direct link to relevant matters relating to the Inquiry and this has been updated to now also include a link to the Office of the Commissioner. Council's website will be kept up to date so residents can follow the proactive release of the information.

Residents are also advised that Ms Marissa Racomelara has agreed to stay on with Council as a conduit in the provision of information that may be required by the Commissioner. Without any way reflecting on current staff the General Manager and myself agree that this will ensure independence, transparency and community confidence as no doubt numerous records of Council will be required.

It has been brought to my attention that there are unfounded rumours that the Public Inquiry will cost ratepayers over \$1million and delay the elections for over 12 months.

The length of the Inquiry is a matter for the Commissioner and obviously Council will have its own costs but in normal circumstances direct costs are borne by the Government. However, s438v of the Local Government Act provides that the Office of Local Government may recover the reasonable expenses incurred by the State in holding a Public Inquiry if the Inquiry relates to a reoccurring problem within the administration of the Council. This can include previous Ministerial intervention such as the issue of a Performance Improvement Order and as residents are well aware the actions of the Minister in this regard failed.

When more is known as to how the Commissioner intends to conduct the Inquiry I have asked the General Manager to provide a further report.

For the record it is advised that \$115,022.96 has been expended by Council on audits/reviews initiated by me and made publicly available. In my view this has been ratepayer's money very well spent and is broken down as an attachment to this Minute. I note that the report of Mr Norm Smith, has only been commissioned.

The rebuild of Wingecarribee Shire Council is well underway and the Public Inquiry can only add value to that process helping to ensure that the community has a Council that is serving its best interests.

Council is a member of Local Government NSW (LGNSW). LGNSW is an independent member-based organisation that exists to serve the interests of New South Wales general

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and special purpose councils. LGNSW provides advocacy, representation and support to member councils to deliver improved services and better outcomes to their local communities.

LGNSW Board elections will be held on 7 October 2021. As an Interim Administrator, I am precluded from voting on the Board elections as outlined in Section 37 (b) of Rules of the Local Government NSW. However, I will be able to represent Wingecarribee at the Special Meeting in November and the LGNSW Special Conference scheduled between 28 February and 3 March 2022 if Council elections have not been held before this time.

The LGNSW Special Conference will consider Motions put to the Conference. The conference provides an opportunity to share ideas, seek inspiration, and plays an important role in determining the local government sector's policy directions for the coming year. This conference will also will focus on how councils can drive a "Locally Led" employment and economic recovery, as we continue to grapple with the complex challenges posed by the COVID pandemic.

It is important to note that the LGNSW rules provide for 1 vote per person and no proxies. The Conference will be held in Sydney.

As my term has now been extended, I am proposing from the October Council Meeting to introduce an Open Question Time at 2:45pm on Council meeting days. Hopefully some of the Covid-19 restrictions will have been lifted but if it is more convenient for a resident I will be happy to take questions remotely.

While I will still be very available for meetings I am introducing this initiative to ensure that residents are able to interact with me directly. Questions may be in writing and I will ensure that everyone is responded to. Open question time will not be webcast as it is not the intention to provide a political forum and over the next few weeks I will work with the General Manager to provide some operational guidelines which will be available on the Council's website.

I have also asked the General Manager to investigate opportunities for a publicly available index of all matters listed for the Council's consideration. Councillors (or for that matter Administrators) and interested residents do not have the luxury of finding information electronically and as I have said on a couple of occasions I have difficulty in researching Minutes. Inconsistent headings also don't help and I am determined to open the perceived mystery of Council operations.

I have also asked the General Manager to initiate action to introduce electronic voting in the Council Chambers and possibly linking same to the publicly available index.

It continues to be a very busy time at the Council and like residents we are having to cope with the extra demands of Covid-19 restrictions.

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It is business as usual and while residents may or may not be aware that while the doors of many of our facilities are closed the library staff are reaching out to their more elderly members to check on their welfare and our Visitor Centre is making contact with small businesses to ensure they are up-to-date on the assistance programs available from Council, State and Federal Governments.

I am assured that the Council operations are running as best they can in the current challenging times and thank the General Manager and staff for their commitment.

Viv May <sup>PSM</sup>

**Interim Administrator**