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## **Administrator Minute - 21 June 2023**

At the April meeting of Council, I advised that the Office of Local Government (OLG) was seeking the reimbursement of \$420,782.30 as its reasonable expenses incurred in relation to the Wingecarribee Public Inquiry. It was noted that the total cost of the Inquiry to the State was \$559,575.88.

At the time, I indicated that in my view, charging the ratepayers of Wingecarribee for an action outside of their control was unreasonable, and sought to negotiate a reduction, having regard to both financial and indirect costs associated with the disfunction over a number of years. Support of this position was reflected in the fact that the Local Government Act allows the State to recover reasonable expenses of an Inquiry that is related to a continuing problem with a Council.

Whilst recognising the Council has a number of financial pressures, the Deputy Secretary, Local Government, Department of Planning and Environment holds the view that Council needs to make a contribution and has now agreed to only seek to recover the external costs (being the costs of the Commissioner and Council assisting) which was \$350,000.

Whilst not an ideal outcome, the negotiations were conducted in a spirit of taking Wingecarribee Shire Council forward and I recommend that \$200,000 be voted from the Election Reserve to Working Capital and the balance of funds be allocated from Councils' Unrestricted Working Capital Position.

I sought to negotiate a reduction of costs to assist in funding an Emergency Operations Centre at the Civic Centre and it will be noted from the 2023/24 Draft Budget, that an allocation of \$240,000 is provided and this is a priority project. Negotiations are continuing at both a State and Federal Level to secure funding for the provision of equipment and I am hopeful of an early outcome in that regard.

Friday, 2 June 2023 was a big night for the Wingecarribee Shire when Her Excellency, Margaret Beazley, Governor of NSW joined our Local Members the Hon. Stephen Jones MP and Judy Hannan MP in re-opening the Bowral Memorial Hall.

Former Presidents and Mayors of the Shire joined residents and during my short presentation I acknowledged those community members who championed the project and who wouldn't be silenced. It is appropriate in this Minute to acknowledge the hard work and extra yards given in the delivery of what is an outstanding outcome that will connect communities for generations to come.

The Council team were exceptional in both designing, overseeing development and delivery of what was a most complex project. The success of the night was in no small part assisted by the contributions of 2ST's Ian Holland, Adam Stokeld from Highlands FM, Southern Highlands Concert Band, Southern Highlands Orchestra, Darren Percival and Richelle Booth who all gave freely of their time, together with a number of volunteer Council staff.

Emeritus Professor Clive Probyn was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in the Kings Birthday 2023 Honours for his distinguished service to the community. While not residing in the Shire (but very close) Ms Kim Hill was also awarded the Order of Australia Medal for service to the community through emergency response organisations. I have written to both recipients thanking them for their contributions and congratulating them on their recognition.

The Shire has been subjected to a number of severe weather events in recent years that have had a significant impact on infrastructure, in particular our roads and Wingecarribee has been

declared a National Disaster Area on a number of occasions. The Canberra Regional Joint Organisation (CRJO) commissioned a report to the Inquiry into the Implication of Severe Weather Events, which has previously been reported to Council, and which is attracting attention at both levels of Government, particularly in relation to the betterment component of Emergency Grants. The importance of being an active member of the CRJO is no better demonstrated than by the invitation of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Roads to the CRJO Bega Valley, Eurobodalla and Wingecarribee Councils to appear and present evidence.

Council was represented by our technical expert – the Manager of Shire Presentation Mr Greg Bray, and he is to be commended.

I attended the Annual meeting of the NSW Local Roads Congress held at Parliament House on Monday, 5 June 2023. Together with over 100 representatives of NSW Local Government, under the theme ‘Sustainable Investment’. It was a worthwhile investment of time with newly appointed Ministers, The Hon. John Graham MP and Jenny Atchison MP, together with Shadow Ministers, Natalie Ward and Sam Faraway making keynote addresses and there was a very interesting ministerial panel discussion. There was also considerable discussion in relation to the management and maintenance of the State’s local road network and the effects that recent natural disasters have had on same and the need for more Government funding and a better model for Storm Damage Grants. The Communique released in relation to the Congress is attached.

Potholes, and deterioration of both sealed and unsealed roads, whether they be under the control of Council or the State, are an issue across the Nation. Wingecarribee is not isolated from this problem – having incurred storm damaged infrastructure costs in the order of \$90M and Governments of all political persuasion in my view are listening. There is currently a consultation paper on the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding and I have asked the General Manager to provide a submission and for it to be tabled at the July meeting.

Together with the General Manager, I joined more than 1100 representatives from the 537 Local Authorities across the Nation, in Canberra for the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) 2023 National General Assembly on 14-15 June 2023.

The content of the Assembly was excellent with a good cross section of discussion on matters relevant to Local Government and provided an opportunity for both Government and Opposition members to make presentations. A number of motions were also considered relevant to Local Government that inform advocacy by ALGA at a Federal Level. A copy of the Communique will be placed on the Council’s website when received.

Prior to the Assembly, on Tuesday 13 June, the ALGA 2023 Regional Cooperation and Development Forum was held when a number of relevant issues were also discussed in a regional environment, including disaster mitigation, road safety and housing.

Friday, 16 June saw the return of the Australian Council of Local Government sponsored by the Prime Minister, when he made a major presentation and outlined an additional \$100M in funding for the Community Energy Upgrades for Local Governments. Over 10 Ministers joined panel discussions – including the Member for Whitlam and Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services, the Hon. Stephen Jones MP when it was emphasised that the Government wants to work in a respectful and positive way directly with Local Government.

During our time in Canberra, the General Manager and I were also afforded the opportunity of meeting with Mr Jones at his Parliament House office, where we had constructive discussions in relation to the Council’s 2023/24 Budget, charges and fees and affordable and emergency housing

and it would be appropriate to acknowledge his being so free with his valuable time during a demanding parliamentary session.

The General Manager will be updating at the next meeting of Council the staff's work in relation to the Development Application backlog and how transparency is being improved in the consideration of same.

Much work is being undertaken behind the scenes to improve the DA tracker to allow easier access to files and DA progressing. This is a work in progress and residents may be assured that I am determined to have an outcome that while consistent with Statutory obligations, is easily accessible and transparent – I even want phone calls in relation to matters, submissions received and internal communication documented and have asked the General Manager to ensure that a timeline for such is included in the July report. Such action in my view will substantially free up time of Council officers as residents will be able to simply look online to see progress.

## 2023 NSW Local Roads Congress

### Sustainable Investment

The NSW Roads and Transport Directorate, a partnership between Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and the NSW Division of the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA NSW and ACT), is proud to present the 2023 Local Roads Congress Communiqué.

Local and regional transport infrastructure is critical to the safety, resilience, prosperity, and social well-being of NSW communities. The Local Roads Congress (Congress) emphasises the pivotal role of Local Government in shaping local and regional transport infrastructure in partnership with State and Federal Governments.

The last four years have seen massive disruption to NSW communities, the local road network and associated services, due to extensive damage from natural disasters. These issues have been exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19, skills and supply shortages, and cost inflation rates significantly outstripping rate pegging and Government funding support. The Congress celebrates the efforts of NSW councils to recover damaged local road infrastructure in challenging times of unprecedented workloads.

The Australian Government reported that without action, the economic cost of natural disasters will increase from \$38B to \$73B per annum by 2060 (National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021-25). Local Government must play a major role in improving the resilience of the local road network, recognising that this requires immediate action to facilitate network-wide changes over the medium-long term. Improving the resilience of local roads on a network basis will mitigate the traumatic impacts of natural disasters on affected communities and reduce future costs to all levels of Government. The current overall Government funding models are reactive, insufficient for the scale of the task, inherently inefficient, and poorly aligned to the function of Local Government. The base funding levels do not support the development and retention of a sustainable workforce within Local Government due to an over-reliance on competitive grants. These arrangements do not support proactive infrastructure planning or efficient delivery of projects and services due to funding uncertainty.

The Congress unanimously agreed that a new watershed partnership between Local Government and the NSW and Australian Governments is warranted. This will enable the progression of the local road network toward a sustainable future with the specific goals of improving the safety, social equity, prosperity, liveability, and resilience of NSW communities. The Congress acknowledges this is a shared responsibility and that Local Government must act as a proactive partner to deliver positive outcomes.

## 2023 NSW Local Roads Congress

### Sustainable Investment

#### NSW Local Government

The Congress acknowledges the need to develop improved network-wide plans to address road safety, resilience, productivity, freight movement, and liveability inclusive of all modes of road-related transport.

The Congress identifies that the current funding model is insufficient to meet the needs of NSW local communities and places unprecedented pressure on the current resources within NSW Local Government. The current inequitable and uncertain Government funding arrangements also creates significant challenges in infrastructure planning over the medium term.

The Congress supports a commitment from Local Government to:

- i) Continue to partner with the NSW and Australian Governments to address current and future challenges to deliver fit-for-purpose local transport infrastructure.
- ii) Develop and implement road network safety plans based on a safe systems approach with specific actions to lower road-related trauma.
- iii) Develop and implement critical infrastructure and resilience plans, including reducing the adverse impacts of natural disasters on local roads and associated infrastructure.
- iv) Integrate the outcomes of road network safety and critical infrastructure resilience plans into local transport network plans, asset and risk management plans, community strategic plans, delivery programs, and operational plans, by reporting to the community via annual reports.
- v) Develop and implement improved workforce plans to address the current and future skills shortages in the professional engineering and skilled infrastructure worker disciplines.
- vi) Work with IPWEA NSW & ACT, LGNSW, the NSW Roads and Transport Directorate, tertiary education, and other providers to ensure the development of suitable training programs focussed on managing overall local road networks as well as efficient delivery of maintenance, renewal, and construction activities to local communities.
- vii) Local government continue to report annually on the State of their Assets as per the ALGA agreed performance measures and verify the accuracy of the data included in the reporting.
- viii) Collaborate with NSW Government to formulate a program dedicated to the replacement of causeways, with the primary objective of enhancing natural disaster resilience through betterment.

## 2023 NSW Local Roads Congress

### Sustainable Investment

#### NSW Government

The Congress calls on the NSW Government to:

- i) Continue the Fixing Country Bridges Program with a priority on replacing timber bridges. Expand the program to allow for flexibility to improve the resilience of the local road network by including other structures, such as the replacement of major culverts, as well as aging concrete and steel structures.
- ii) Collaborate with Local Government to formulate a program dedicated to the improvement and upgrading of causeways, with the primary objective of enhancing natural disaster resilience through betterment.
- iii) Continue the Fixing Local Roads Program with an annual allocation aligned to the Roads to Recovery distribution formula to provide greater certainty and allow improved short-medium term infrastructure planning by NSW Local Government.
- iv) Continue to provide competitive grants for the improvement of freight outcomes by addressing first and last-mile challenges on the local and regional road network.
- v) Work with LGNSW to negotiate the removal of emergency services levy charges from NSW Councils for the NSW Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service, and NSW Fire and Rescue to assist councils to maintain and improve the resilience of Councils roads infrastructure.
- vi) As a matter of urgency, finalise the Regional Roads Transfer and Reclassification Review to provide certainty to Local Government.
- vii) Facilitate an audit of the long-term financial plan of each local government to ensure alignment with the asset management plan lifecycle forecasts that communicate the trade-offs on performance, cost, and risk.
- viii) Work with Local Government to develop a program to strengthen the maintenance, safety, and resilience of the State highway network, giving particular attention to sections that are prone to flooding or experience access limitations during fire incidents.
- ix) Commit to ongoing support for Road Safety initiatives across the entire road network. In particular, to support the development and implementation of Road Safety Strategic Plans at all NSW councils.

## 2023 NSW Local Roads Congress

### Sustainable Investment

#### Australian and NSW Government

The Congress calls on the Australian and NSW Governments to work together with NSW Local Governments to address the following:

- i) A more sustainable long-term funding model for Local Government with a higher level of base funding support and reduced reliance on individual competitive grants.
- ii) A proactive strategy to address the skills shortage in skilled professional Engineers and infrastructure workers.
- iii) A more sustainable model for Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements in New South Wales for all NSW councils focusing on equity and building back better.
- iv) Develop new guidelines for the Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements to allow increased flexibility to build back better with fast, efficient approval mechanisms that enable timely recovery work post-disaster.
- v) Work with Local Government to ensure improved arrangements are put in place for the provision and ongoing care of roads servicing large-scale green power projects such as wind and solar farms, as well as forestry and mining projects, to reduce the cost shift to Local Government.
- vi) Reduce red tape and provide additional Government resources to enable faster approvals for road infrastructure construction, maintenance, and management, including during disaster recovery works.
- vii) Continue to collaborate with Local Governments, businesses, and the international community to address longer-term climate change.

#### Australian Government

The Congress calls on the Australian Government to:

- i) Increase the Roads to Recovery Program to \$1B per annum from 2024-25 onwards, as this funding program is regarded by Local Government as the most efficient mechanism and source of funding for local roads.
- ii) Increase the annual Roads to Recovery Program allocations to align with the construction cost index and the growth in the road asset base, ensuring maintenance of funding levels in real terms.
- iii) Revise the Roads to Recovery Statement of Intent to include the development of local road safety and resilience plans, as well as the integration of natural disaster

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### Sustainable Investment

- adaptation strategies into council transport, asset management, long-term financial plans, delivery programs, and annual budgets.
- iv) Allow councils to utilise Roads to Recovery funding to assist in the development of Road Resilience, Road Safety Strategic, and Road Network Management Plans. Funds would be allocated as a one-off 50/50 funding model with a maximum limit of \$50,000 per Council (subject to increasing the overall Roads to Recovery funding).
  - v) As a minimum, double the Australian Government's Bridge Renewal Program from \$85m per annum to \$170m per annum to target improving the resilience of local road routes. Prioritise funding for the replacement of timber and hybrid bridges, and other vulnerable structures.
  - vi) Provide a financial incentive program to assist Local Government to employ, train and develop new Cadet Engineers.
  - vii) Work with professional bodies such as IPWEA Australasia to increase the capacity and skills of public works personnel, with a specific focus on road network planning, road drainage, road pavements, road surfacing, and asset management.
  - viii) Work with universities to increase the focus on the whole of road network planning, road drainage, road pavements, road surfacing, and asset management in future Engineering degree course curriculum.
  - ix) Continue to support apprenticeship programs to develop new and existing workers in the operational skills required to build and maintain roads.
  - x) Support ongoing research into cost-effective, resilient road materials and independent product reviews by specialist organisations such as the National Transport Research Organisation (NTRO). Provide appropriate guidelines and training programs to put this research into practice.
  - xi) Promote circular economy principles in road infrastructure by incorporating sustainable and innovative technologies that prioritise environmental sustainability. This includes using renewable resources, adopting advanced construction methods, and promoting the use of recycled materials while setting specific targets for reducing carbon emissions and other environmental impacts.
  - xii) Provide direct financial assistance to local governments to enable them to adapt their asset management systems to the requirements of HVRR. Specific targets should be established for integrating HVRR into Local Government operations to ensure the efficient use of these resources.



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### Sustainable Investment

- xiii) Develop robust capacity-building programs and training sessions for Local Government staff engaged in asset management. These programs should focus on improving the understanding of HVRR and its implications for asset management. Measurable outcomes, such as the number of staff trained or improvements in asset management efficiency, can help gauge the success of these programs.
- xiv) Proactively engage with NSW Local Government and the Roads and Transport Directorate in developing the NSLS and HVRR. By setting clear channels for communication and consultation, the needs and experiences of local communities can be better represented in these standards and reforms.

The 2023 NSW Local Roads Congress, under the banner of 'Sustainable Investment', underscores the necessity of strategic investment in local road infrastructure that ensures safety, efficiency, and resilience both now and into the future. We call on all levels of government to take decisive action towards these goals for the ultimate benefit of all NSW residents.

In addition to the key strategies and objectives outlined in this communiqué, the 2023 NSW Local Roads Congress emphasises the importance of continued dialogue and consistent follow-up actions. Sustainable investment is not a one-time decision but a continuous commitment, and the successful implementation of these proposals relies on consistent collaboration and evaluation.

The NSW Local Roads Congress concludes with a strong call to action, urging all stakeholders to unite in their efforts to enhance the local road network, improve safety, foster economic prosperity, and ensure the resilience and well-being of NSW communities. Through this collective commitment and shared responsibility, we can create lasting positive change for the benefit of all.