

MAYORAL MINUTE

I acknowledge that there is a vast array of issues to address during our term, with much expected of us. However, a clear theme emerged during the election—a strong focus on our fundamental responsibilities and core obligations.

Where I would like to begin, is at the very heart of these issues and at the top of the list sits the condition of our roads and the timeframes for processing Development Applications.

Residents should be aware that we will soon be crafting new budgets, meaning funding and resources will be shifted, some areas and objectives may receive less funding or be excluded entirely. It will be our job to put together a hierarchy of needs and make the hard decisions.

Residents deserve better roads, noting that the condition of our roads has deteriorated over the past 5-10 years and “better” roads will take time. “Better roads” will also mean a shifting of resources.

The fixing of potholes as an interim measure needs to be a priority to remove the dangers to road users and damage to cars.

Council currently has 315 outstanding potholes reported by residents, but not all potholes are reported, and it is estimated that upward of 1500 currently exist on our road network. It is estimated that the sealed road network incurs around 12,000 potholes each year and this is heavily influenced by the weather and legacy road issues.

Council currently has one dedicated crew at a cost of \$1.5 million to fix potholes on sealed roads, in addition two grading teams that focus on maintenance works across the rural road network.

I am requesting the General Manager to bring a report back to Council on the state of our roads and the budget impacts for the 2025/26 and future years to address the condition of our road network with the aim to fix all potholes within seven (7) days of being reported.

In addition, I want greater transparency in the work completed for the community, updates on the numbers of potholes fixed and roads maintained with the update published in the weekly e-newsletter each month commencing on 1 November 2024.

Development Application (DA) determination timeframes for Wingecarribee have increased substantially in recent years, slowing the delivery of housing and other development within our Shire. Currently it takes on average 263 days for a DA to be determined, which is one of the slowest timeframes in the State and quite frankly is unacceptable.

Our DA determination timeframe is significantly slower than the expected timeframe of 115 days which was recently set by the Hon. Paul Scully MP Minister for Planning and Public Spaces. Currently, only 16% of our Shire’s DAs are determined within the expected timeframe.

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Comparatively, 62% of all DAs in NSW and 62% of all DAs in Regional NSW are determined within the expected timeframe.

It is noted that from 1 July 2025, the expected timeframe for Wingecarribee reduces to 105 days and will continue to be less each year through to 2027 where the Minister's expectation is an average determination timeframe of 85 days.

In the past quarter the total value of DA's determined within our Shire exceeded \$100M. Imagine what the growth and benefit to the entire community would be if we determined DA's as effectively and efficiently as possible?

We will be highlighting the performance of our DA's monthly to ensure we strive to meet our community's needs. I have requested routine reporting which will profile data and the status of initiatives to monitor how our Council is improving with a goal to meet the Minister's expectations.

My focus will be on:

- improving the quality and timeliness of service to our community whilst monitoring the costs of service;
- meeting the Minister's expected DA determination timeframes;
- promoting the receipt of timely and quality information from Applicants; and
- monitoring the status of Land and Environment Court matters where Council is a party.

Currently, Council is determining more DA's than the current number of DA's being received. However, based on current practices and projections, it will take approximately one and half years to determine our current DA backlog in addition to new DAs received. Our backlog of DAs is currently being targeted for determination, however, with this comes the reality that Council's average days and the percentage of Applications meeting the Minister's expectations will get worse before it gets better.

The General Manager has advised that improvement initiatives are underway which include:

- improving the speed and availability of information to DA applicants and the community via artificial intelligence, our already established DA tracker and the NSW Planning Portal;
- reducing our reliance on consultants and strengthening our in-house capacity through increased skill, knowledge and resourcing; and
- strengthening the functionality and efficiency of our systems and processes.

As Mayor, my goal for our Shire is to lift Council's current percentage of DA's being determined within the Ministers expected timeframe from the current rate of 16% to 62%, matching the NSW average, at the one-year mark of the new council being sworn in.

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THAT the General Manager:

1. prepare a report:
 - a. on the current state of the Shire's roads and maintenance service levels
 - b. Expected budget impacts for 2025/26 and future years if service levels increased to have potholes fixed within seven (7) days of being reported.
2. provide a monthly update on road maintenance including number of reported potholes published in Council's e-newsletter each month commencing in November 2024.
3. commence routine reporting on Development Application progress to monitor how Council is improving with a goal to meet the Minister's expectations.