

# Mayoral Report



Keeping in touch  
with our community



Mayor Councillor Betty Green  
October 2006 - August 2007

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## Introduction

Since taking on the mayoral role last September I have been on a steep learning curve and have enjoyed immensely the challenges of this position.

Even though I had already learnt much as a Councillor, my first year as Mayor has taught me that there is even more to know about the factors that influence Council's procedures and decision-making. It is a much more complex and time-consuming role than many people realise because:

- Government regulations must be taken into consideration before Council acts;
- More consultation and negotiation is required, not only with our local community, but also with different levels of Government; and
- The amount of knowledge required to do a good job is constantly expanding.

I relish the opportunity, if I am elected for a second term, to put to good use what I have already learned.

My goal for this term as Mayor was to improve Council's relationships and consultation with the community and I am very pleased with the progress made in this area so far.

As Mayor, I have consciously taken several steps towards achieving this goal. I have tried to:

- Be available often to members of the community;
- Be open to feedback;

- Be encouraging when people raised issues of concern; and
- Attend as many functions as possible to show Council's commitment to, and involvement with, its community.

Through the mayoral column, which appears weekly in both the Macleay Argus and the Macleay Happynings, I have sought to share information with the community about why council acts as it does and to keep the community informed about activities which occur throughout the shire. I have also drawn attention to many community concerns through Mayoral Minutes tabled at Council and reported back to Council on my community activities.

The communication channels are open; Council is listening and is trying to involve the community more in its decision-making. Let me be the first to say, however, that there is always room for further improvement so I will continue to strive for better relationships between Council and the community.



**E A Green  
MAYOR**



## Consultation

### Community consultation

One of the highlights of the year was the development of the Community Strategic Plan to replace the Corporate Strategic Plan.

I am very proud of this document which was developed by the community through a focus group made up of community representatives nominated by people attending community workshops (held in November 2006). This group of passionate, enthusiastic individuals pulled together all the suggestions from these workshops to develop the current Community Strategic Plan. Congratulations to all members of this focus group on a job well done. Thank you also to all who took the time to be involved in this vital forward planning project.

Other achievements this year include the development and adoption of the Ecologically Sustainable Development strategy, which was finalised and adopted earlier this year. It was very gratifying to have received such excellent community response to the consultation process for this strategy.

In October 2006 kerbside recycling was successfully introduced after an extensive community education program involving print and radio media and a community information display at the 'Celebrate the Macleay' expo. It is important that we all act diligently to recycle every product we possibly can to reduce the environmental impact at our landfill site.

### Strategic alliances

Strategic alliances are partnerships with other councils that can help Council find ways to reduce its costs and improve service. The Mid North Coast Group of Councils (MIDGOC) is one such alliance that has been

of tremendous value to Council.

Council is seeking to strengthen its alliances and may build links with other councils across the state at various times to help increase its ability to provide services that will stretch your rates dollars further.

Council is a member of the Local Government & Shires Association (LGSA) and an associate member of the Local Government Association. Through these memberships Council gains access to:

- support on State and Federal issues which impact on Council including cost shifting.
- information and training to assist us in improving our service.

Attendance at the LGSA conference often provides access to Government Ministers, Heads of Government Departments and achievers in private industry allowing Council attendees to network and lobby on issues important to our Shire.

### Conference attendance

The number of conferences attended by Councillors and Council staff has attracted criticism at times. This issue is a double edged sword. If we do *not* attend we will not be at the cutting edge of decisions being made that may affect the operation of your Council. If we *do* attend it is said that Council is being recklessly extravagant.

The fact is that these conferences provide Council with an opportunity to discover new ideas, some of which may save us money, and to compare our performance in particular areas with other Councils and organisations. These conferences also build knowledge within Council which enables it to initiate or improve service provision to ratepayers.



## ***Building Social Capital***

In the past people have understood Council as simply being responsible for Roads, Rates and Rubbish but building and maintaining a good lifestyle for the inhabitants of our shire involves much more than this. We need to build our social capital, that is, invest in the well-being of our people.

Some people may feel that Council's involvement in Recreation, Culture and the Arts (in its various forms) should not be the province of Council. The reality is that unless Council gets involved and shows leadership in these areas we will not attract funding opportunities to the area for this type of activity, which will affect the quality of our lifestyle in the long term. Ideally, Council's role is to stimulate interest in these areas by encouraging as many people as possible to be involved. It is not Council's responsibility to actually provide these services but rather to ensure that this shire receives adequate funding for the services it needs from other tiers of government. Our Social Plan is the directional document that identifies what Council is doing to help fill the service gaps in social areas for such groups as Youth, Indigenous and the Aged, amongst others.

### **Educational opportunities**

Kempsey has a variety of pre-schools, primary and secondary school facilities of high quality that provide a wide range of educational opportunities for the shire's children. They provide much more than just the 3 R's. This is evidenced by the number of young people who excel in the fields of sport, art and culture. It is a privilege to meet these young people when they are performing or when their achievements are acknowledged by the community.

Council has encouraged the involvement of our schools in the Arts through several projects this year. For example the exhibition

of the 2006 HSC Artworks and 'The Hat, the Head and the Habitat' exhibitions held at the Macleay Community Art Gallery late last year. Following on from last year's successful exhibition the 2007 HSC Art works will be displayed later this year. Council has also initiated a 'Waste into Art' project with local schools as part of its waste and recycling education program, which will culminate in an exhibition at the gallery in early November 2007.

Council also contributes to the Academy of Sport on an annual basis. We have around 13 young people currently attending the Academy. There are also several coaches and volunteers involved with the Academy's training programs, some seeking qualification others providing the training. Our sporting achievements link back to Council's provision of sporting fields and recreation areas. For example the National Softball titles were held here earlier this year (and will be again in 2008) as a result of partnerships between community organisations, the strength of volunteering, and Council's support.

Education and Training, a high priority for Council, is unfortunately tied up with significant consultation with other government departments. None the less, Council has pursued this issue encouraging schools and local business to introduce Senior Students to career choices and workplace requirements that are needed in our Shire. Council has continued to support projects such as the Medical and Engineering scholarship schemes for local HSC Students and currently has 10 people employed through Traineeships & Apprenticeships. We are also lobbying TAFE to review the programming of courses at its Kempsey Campus, to better meet the career needs of people within in our Shire.



## ***Planning for sustainability & economic prosperity***

### **Planning & Development**

Kempsey Shire is part of the Seachange phenomena, with significant numbers of people moving into coastal areas. To cope successfully with this trend we need to have well planned development, which adopts an overall view of the shire rather than a piecemeal approach that focuses on particular areas of the shire. Progress in this area is tied up with studies currently being undertaken as part of the revision of our Local Environmental Plan (LEP) which is required by early next year under State legislation. This review will ensure that the principles of sustainable development are incorporated into all Council's activities.

The recently released State Plan and the draft Mid North Coast Regional Plan will further assist Council with planning sustainably over the next 5 to 10 years.

Progress on the Highway by-pass of Kempsey is moving along, albeit very slowly. The route has been finalised, studies completed and the process has been verified. We are now awaiting the allocation of funding and are hopeful that work will commence in 2010.

### **Developing Economic Prosperity**

The development of more industrial land is progressing slowly as people would be aware of the need for various environmental studies to be completed before such appropriate land can be identified and released.

Council assists local business to enhance and expand its activities where appropriate through business breakfasts and luncheons and facilitates education and training opportunities for members of the business community and their staff. During the past year 154 people have participated in 5 such sessions.

During the year I have met with various community organisations such as the Chambers of Commerce and Ratepayers associations to gain feedback and to provide encouragement for their efforts to advance the Shire's prosperity.

### **Cost shifting affects services**

One of the conundrums faced by Council is how to deal with subtle cost shifting by other tiers of government. As a Council it is difficult to resist the offer of short-term full funding from State or Federal Government for new programs which Council knows have merit and will be of benefit to our community. The pitfall of accepting this type of funding is that there is no guarantee of continuity as all, or part, of the funding may be discontinued after the program is initially introduced, leaving Council to deal with community disappointment because it cannot afford to fund the program entirely from its own resources.

A recent case in point was the situation with one of Council's Community Development positions, which was initially fully funded as a full time position by the State Government. Over time, however, the grant funding has not kept pace with wage costs and, while Council values the funding it receives it cannot continue filling the ever-widening funding gap. In such a situation it was necessary for Council to reduce the hours for this position to 21 hours a week.

Services such as health, policing & crime prevention, education, aged care and social welfare services fall under the responsibility of other tiers of government such as State or Federal. Council can only lobby the State or Federal Government to improve service levels in our Shire for these particular areas.



## Awards & Achievements

### Awards

The Council staff who work for people like you and I (the ratepayers) of this Shire, have achieved some outstanding results with, and for, our community in the past 12 months. As a community we should be extremely proud of these achievements, some of which are listed below:

- The Shire achieved outstanding results in the Keep Australia Beautiful "2007 Clean Beach Challenge" with Horseshoe Bay being named State Runner Up in the Overall Clean Beach Award after winning this category at the Mid North Coast Region level. Other awards won at regional level were the Community Action Award (Killick Beach) and Local Government Leadership Award (Kempsey Shire Council). Thank you to Council's Civic Maintenance team and the community members who were involved in helping us achieve such a great result.
- Macleay Water won the NSW Sustainable Water Challenge in the Greenfield Development Category for the South West Rocks Wastewater Recycling Project.
- Council's Customer First Centre won a Local Government Management Association 'Gold Award for Management Excellence in Rural Councils' for its Knowledge Management System.
- Council's Engineering Cadet Karen McKenzie won a University of Newcastle Scholarship Scheme Achievement Award at the University Foundation Award 2006.
- The "Lost but not Forgotten" Aboriginal Memorial stone installed at East Kempsey cemetery received a Local Government Cultural Award.

### Naturalisations

Since October last year I have had the pleasure of naturalising 23 new Australian Citizens.

Kempsey Shire is rich in cultural diversity. The 2006 Census shows that 1,899 people residing in our shire originated from 35 different countries.

### Certificates of Merit

The following people have received community awards of distinction for their sporting achievements representing the Shire at National level:

Kira McGoldrick (Cricket), Craig Fisher (Baseball), Kerri Fuller (Baseball), Emily Clarke (Soccer), Michael Quinn (Hockey), and Leith Brodie (Swimming).

### Australia Day

The shire's Australia Day celebrations were a great success this year, incorporating for the first time a family fun day with the official ceremonies. I was proud and pleased to present the following recipients with the 2007 Australia Day Awards for the Kempsey Shire:

- *Citizen of the Year Award*  
Sister Cabrini & Miss Margaret Jopling  
(joint award)
- *Community Service Award*  
Macleay River Historical Society
- *Community Entertainment, Music and Arts Awards*  
The Senior Music Makers



## Conclusion

From time to time I hear the comment 'There's nothing to do in Kempsey'. Given the number of community groups and organisations that provide employment and volunteering opportunities which are actively engaged in the community there is little need to be bored.

During meetings of our Health and Ageing Working Parties (sub-committees of our Social Strategic Planning Committee) it has become obvious that the more people become involved in their community the better the health they enjoy, especially as they get older. The ramifications this holds for managing the Shire's Ageing population are huge. The more involvement we have from all sectors of the community, the more vibrant and inclusive it will become.

As we move towards the future I invite you all to work with Council to build a community which provides opportunity for all.

Volunteering in its broadest sense means doing something freely that you are not obligated to do.

It is extremely gratifying to see first-hand, through attending functions in my role as Mayor and Councillor, just how many people within this shire give their time, energy and effort to being involved in extra activities when they already lead busy lives. It is the generous spirit of people like these that truly enriches our society.

Thank you to all the community organisations, volunteers, my fellow Councillors and Council staff for all the work they have put into improving and maintaining the lifestyle of all in the area.

When you look at some of the achievements and positions of esteem held by people who are born, bred and educated on the Macleay it's about time we stop knocking this shire and started to beat the drum with pride!

