



## **DIRECTOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REPORT**

13<sup>th</sup> November 2007

<b>DSDS1</b>	<b>STAFFING ISSUES - SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES</b>	<b>{Folio No. *}</b>
	<b>FILE: 584 RBP</b>	

### **SUMMARY:**

Reporting on the impact of current staffing shortages on the services provided by Council's Sustainable Development Services Department and the steps being taken to address the problem.

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Council would be aware through previous reports and advices that Australia is currently suffering from a chronic shortage of planners. A survey by the Planning Institute of Australia indicates that in 2004 there was a vacancy rate of 20% in planning positions. A DLG report in 2005 identified planning as the area suffering the most critical shortages in local government.

Recent media reports indicate that this rate has increased since that time which is supported by anecdotal evidence from discussions at the MIDGOC Town Planners Group meetings that suggests the shortages are even greater in regional areas.

Over the last two years the vacancy rate at Kempsey Shire Council has been 40% - 60%. Exacerbating this shortage has been Council's inability to attract experienced planners, with the Manager Planning and Natural Resources position being vacant for 11 months.

Council has three (3) designated Area Planner positions, of which there were two (2) Area Planner positions that were vacant for up to six (6) months, despite extensive advertising offering a competitive salary package.

A temporary appointment to one of the positions has been made with the successful applicant to commence in November 2007.

### **Implications for Service Delivery**

Council's Strategic Planning Program comprises 36 projects which represents a substantial increase from any time in the past. Council has indicated that it considers the delivery of this program to be one of its highest priorities and subsequently allocated a significant increase in funding in the 2007 / 08 Budget.

In order to accommodate the program, including expedition of the Kempsey Shire Strategic Direction, considerable reorganisation of resources within Sustainable Development Services has been necessary.

- Planner's roles have been altered to include development assessment and strategic planning.
- Building Inspectors now assess a broader range of Development Applications involving the erection of buildings.
- The previous Manager Economic Development provided management support to Strategic Planning and progressed several projects, with obvious implications for Economic Development projects.
- Other staff within the Department have also been utilised to assist with strategic planning projects.
- Consultants have, or are intended to be engaged to process larger Development Applications and to process minor Local Environmental Plan (LEP) amendments.
- A system to facilitate private certification of Construction Certificates for subdivision works has been introduced.
- Development Control Plan 30 has been reviewed to facilitate the increased utilisation of Complying Development, which is expected to account for in excess of 30% of Development Applications.
- The Department has been actively involved in the development and implementation of Council's Human Resources Strategy which incorporates strategic workforce planning.
- A Trainee Town Planner has been appointed and is enrolled in an Assistant Town Planners course at TAFE in a bid to build capacity from within.
- Council is participating in an Urban and Regional Planning scholarship program at the University of New England which is scheduled to commence in February 2008.
- The preparation of Section 94 contributions plans, which forms a significant component of the Strategic Planning Program, has been accelerated by the joint employment of a Project Officer with Bellingen and Nambucca Councils.

With recent appointments to the positions of Manager Planning and Natural Resources and Manager Economic Development and a temporary appointment to one of the Area Planner positions, it is expected that progress on strategic planning and economic development projects will significantly improve. However, progress may be restricted until an appointment is made to the vacant Area Planner position and new staff familiarise themselves with legislative requirements and Council's systems.

### **REPORT IMPLICATIONS:**

- *Environmental*

*National skills shortages, which are chronic in respect to town planning, are resulting in significant impacts on the provision of effective strategic planning which is essential to ensure decisions achieve desired environmental outcomes.*

- *Social*

*Current vacancies limit Council's ability to ensure preferred outcomes for future social infrastructure.*

- *Economic (Financial)*

*Impediments to strategic planning adversely impact upon the economic development of the Shire by restricting the timely release of land and provision of infrastructure and facilities.*

- *Directors Comment*

*Despite these difficulties, it is to the credit of staff within the Department that service levels are being maintained through the implementation of innovative work practices and the acceptance of staff to take on additional duties to overcome the shortages.*

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the information be noted.**

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**R B Pitt  
DIRECTOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**