



KEMPSEY
Shire Council

MAYORAL REPORT

13th November 2007

MM1	LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
	FILE: 165 MAYOR (NRN) {Folio No. *}

SUMMARY:

To inform Council of the issues addressed at the Local Government Association Conference.

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DESCRIPTION:

Saturday 20th October 2007 saw our participation in the Forum 'Global problem, Local Solutions – 'leadership on Climate Change'

This was a very interesting and stimulating discussion with many questions being asked by the conference participants. Invited participants were Professor Andy Pittman, who gave a very enlightening overview of current scientific knowledge on the phenomena; Patrice Newell gave an interesting presentation on the environmental issues presently being attributed to Climate Change. Murray Hogarth's presentation was on what is happening in the corporate world to reduce the affects of Climate Change not only in relation to building design and construction but also in relation to produce design, use of resources and carbon trading issues. Very practical session which raised issues such as development of coastal areas and future risk, increasing severe storm events and implications for local government, and more severe flooding events, all of which have possible implications for Kempsey Shire.

From 21st October to 24th October Councillors Hayes and McWilliam, the General Manager and myself attended the Local Government Association Conference in Coffs Harbour. The conference was preceded by a climate change forum entitled "Global Problem Local Solutions".

The conference was addressed by:

- The Hon Paul Lynch MP, Minister for Local Government.
- The Hon Frank Sartor, Minister for Planning.
- The Hon Richard Torbay, Speaker Legislative Assembly.
- Dr Tony Capon, Premiers Council for Active Living NSW and CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems.
- Dr Graeme Pearman, Interim Director Monash Sustainable Institute.
- Hon Chris Hartcher MP, Shadow Minister for Local Government.
- Mr Rod Geer, Managing Director StateCover.

Minister Lynch reiterated that there would be no forced amalgamation of councils and that the Department was relying on resource sharing to drive Local Government efficiencies. The Minister announced that the review of the model Code of Conduct had been completed and the changes are currently being finalised. He did indicate that one of those changes was the Conduct Committee with the Mayor and General Manager not required to be compulsory on the committee.

Frank Sartor praised BASICS and the environmental results it was producing. A discussion paper on Planning Reform is due out in February 2008. Section 94 contributions are being looked at as they affect housing affordability. Price distortion between contributions will be looked at as there needs to be consistency in levees between councils. The issue of LEP's taking too long will also be addressed in the review.

Council had four motions before the conference that covered oral health, climate change and flood mitigation funding. These motions were referred to the Executive as they already form Association policy. Council's late motion on Medical Facilities in Rural NSW was submitted to the Association but I took the opportunity to approach the delegates from Mid-Western Council who had a similar motion and the following composite motion was adopted by conference:

"That the Association requests both State and Federal Governments to urgently set aside funds to ensure that medical facilities in rural NSW are of a sufficient level and standard to ensure people living in rural areas can receive adequate medical services.

Sufficient resources be made available to individual health services to fully staff our hospitals so as to reduce the need for staff working double and triple shifts which could lead to reduced patient safety and contribute to staff burnout and therefore their loss to the health services."

There was a very emotional debate on the drought with the following motion being adopted:

That the Association:

1. Notes the severity of the drought being experienced across Australia and especially in regional New South Wales;
2. Notes with concern that the duration of this drought has exhausted the reserves of many country communities – financially, socially and psychologically – such that restocking and replanting, as well as continued business profitability and social wellbeing at the end of the drought cannot be assumed;
3. Notes that a drought summit was held in Parkes on 25 September 2007, chaired by Cr Bruce Miller, president of the Shires Association of NSW and attended by representatives of local, state and national governments, farmers, businesses, charities, rural counsellors, banks, service clubs and local communities;
4. Endorses for action the priority initiatives identified by the drought summit, namely:
 - a. A minimum 15% annual rate rebate for Local Government and Rural Lands Protection Board rates for bona fide

- primary producers and agriculture-related businesses in areas officially 'in drought'.
- b. Long-term funding and job security for Rural Financial Counsellors and Drought Support Workers.
 - c. Increased funding for councils to maintain and improve local infrastructure.
 - d. Increase in mental health support:
 - On the ground mental health resources – volunteers or other support staff needed to visit homes in drought affected communities;
 - Short training courses to teach delegates how to deal with mental strain; and
 - A fact sheet for individuals to recognise symptoms of mental strain and referral contacts.
 - e. Waiver of fixed water charges for irrigators who have had their allocations reduced due to drought.
 - f. Commitment from State Government that teachers will not be transferred because of falling student numbers in drought-declared areas; and
5. Authorises the President to work with the President of the Shires Association and other members of the Rural Alliance to pursue these priority initiatives through all appropriate channels as a matter of urgency.

Other motions that would be of interest to Council are:

Election Costs

Motion:

That the Association:

1. Deplores the significant and unsubstantiated cost increases advised to councils for the 2008 Local Government elections over the cost of the 2004 elections;
2. Encourages councils to meet individually with the NSW Electoral Commissioner to seek review of and adjustments to these costs;
3. Requires the return of any revenue from fines to the area in which the fines were incurred.
4. Expresses its concern to the Treasurer and the NSW Government at their full cost recovery model for Local Government elections within which councils are expected to fund a state monopoly provider with little or no capacity to manage or influence costs;
5. Calls on the NSW Government to enter into negotiations with a view to formulating an agreed scheme and complementary legislative amendments, allowing councils to conduct their own elections if they so wish; and
6. Calls on the Australian Government to recognise that Local Government elections are integral to the democratic process and fund all elections from taxation revenue.

Structural and Regulatory Arrangements for the Provision of Water & Sewerage

It is recommended that Conference note the pending review by the Minister for Water Utilities, commend the Minister for consulting councils regarding the review, and resolve that the Association and all councils advise the Minister that in order to achieve the objectives of the review,

the outcomes should reflect the following principles:

- promotion of ecological, social and economic sustainability in a broader context beyond water and sewerage functions (Integrated Water Cycle Management);
- recognition of regional differences and that one size does not fit all;
- local ownership and local government management of sustainable water and sewerage assets to ensure continued control of desired land use planning outcomes;
- reinforcement of the role of local, state and federal governments in the reform agenda and the importance of working together;
- financial and non-financial support for improving performance and expertise, such as capacity building programs;
- the water and sewerage entity, in whatever form, remains mindful of and responsive to local community needs/issues in terms of the triple bottom line (social / environmental / economic);
- maintenance and improvement of economies of scope provided by local water utilities; and
- opposition to privatisation of local government assets: i.e. reticulated water supplies across the State of NSW.

Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Sites

That this Conference:

1. Objects strongly to the changes to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act since 2004 have resulted in a reduction in protection of environmentally sensitive sites, a reduced role for local councils in determining development applications, an increase in the powers of the Minister for Planning, an increase in the complexity of development approval processes and a decrease in community involvement in decision making about development applications.
2. Objects strongly to the Minister for Planning, the Urban Taskforce and the Property Council launching a concerted media campaign to attack councils in order to justify removal of all powers to determine development applications from elected councils.
3. Notes the call by the LGA 2006 Conference for the NSW Government to reinstate Environmental Impact Assessment and community consultation processes for all development activity and guarantee that Councils will retain the power to determine development within their municipality has been rebuffed by the Minister for Planning.
4. Re-affirms its commitment to the central role of elected Councillors, as representatives of their communities, in the determination of development applications that will have a significant impact on the community.
5. Calls on the LGA Executive to co-ordinate as a matter of urgency a political campaign in opposition to the latest moves to reduce the role of councils and their communities in determining development applications and to produce materials to publicly rebut the claims being made by developer lobby groups and the Planning Minister that seek to blame councils for slow approval processes.
6. Calls on all NSW Councils to support the LGA campaign.
7. That a copy of the motion be forwarded to all members of Parliament.

Financial Assistance

That the Minister for Local Government be asked to urgently introduce a

threshold below which council can delegate authority to the General Manager under section 377 Local Government Act 1993 (LGA) to provide Financial Assistance under section 356 (LGA).

Constitutional Recognition of Local Government

That the Association:

- a) Supports the President of the NSW Local Government Association and the President of NSW Shires Association in their backing of Federal Labor's commitment to constitutional recognition of Local Government in Australia.
- b) Supports the commitment by Federal Labor to establish a Council of Australian Local Governments to meet bi-annually to strengthen the dialogue between Federal and Local Governments and to ensure Local Government representatives have a more effective voice at COAG.
- c) Calls upon the Coalition to commit itself to these important initiatives for Local Government in Australia.
- d) The Association call upon the State Government to demonstrate its commitment to working with Local Government by signing the draft Inter-governmental Agreement.

Interestingly the Conference did not support two year terms for Mayors and Deputy Mayors elected by Councillors which is contrary to the Shires Association position.

Liverpool Plains won the Shires section of the Bluett Award while Goulburn / Mulwaree won the Local Government Association section. Tamworth will be the venue for the 2009 Conference.

Council case studies were presented by:

- Hornsby Shire Council "Hornsby Earthwise – Triple Bottom Line Sustainability".
- Dubbo City Council "Greenhouse Initiatives of a Regional Council".
- North Sydney Council "Buying Green".

The Local Government Forum held on Saturday 20th October on Climate Change was very informative and was attended by Councillors Hayes, McWilliam and myself.

I also attended a workshop on Wednesday, 24th October.

At the end of the conference I attended the Councillor professional development session on 'Media Skills'. This was a very enlightening and entertaining two hours presented by Greg Crowther. This was a restatement and update on tips when preparing and doing interviews with the media.

REPORT IMPLICATIONS:

- ***Environmental***

Nil

- ***Social***

Nil

- *Economic (Financial)*

Nil

- *Policy or Statutory*

Nil

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

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E A Green
MAYOR