



MAYOR'S REPORT

14th December 2004

M1	MINISTERIAL VISIT
	FILE: R5-2 KJF

SUMMARY:

Reporting on the visit to the Hon. Frank Sartor, MP, Minister for Energy and Utilities.



On Wednesday, 17th November 2004, I participated in a delegation, on behalf of the Mid Coast Group of Councils, to visit the Hon. Frank Sartor, MP, Minister for Energy and Utilities, Minister for Science and Medical Research, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer) and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts. The purpose of the visit was to convey to the Minister the concerns of member Councils about the recently revised Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program (CTWS & SP). Also with the delegation was Councillor Rob Drew, Mayor of Hastings, and Council staff Geoff Newton (Coffs Harbour), Tony Pedlow (Nambucca), Ken Wilson (Bellingen) and Keith Finnie (Kempsey). The meeting was scheduled for 5:00pm and the Minister was accompanied by Colin Macleay, Director, Water Systems (DEUS) and Advisors, Kate Iflad and Aldo Pellin.

The concerns Councils raised were:

1. the new funding formulas.
2. the "priority ranking" of projects.
3. the delays in projects due to ranking.
4. the "confrontational" position Councils will now find themselves in with the community due to delays and funding adjustments.
5. the implication that efficient, low rated schemes (ie less than the "qualifying charge" of \$350) were being penalised.
6. the delays caused by other State Government Departments, particularly DEC (National Parks) and DIPNR.
7. eligible backlogged funds would be foregone in the event a Council needed to augment a scheme, to accommodate growth, in advance of allocation receipt.

The Minister was pleasant and open, allowing us 1 hour for our discussions. He advised that, following a number of concerns raised about the priority rankings, a review of priorities had been completed, involving representatives from the LGSA and the Water Directorate. Some 25 projects had received higher rankings and details on these are

due soon. However, the Minister was quite firm on the new funding arrangements stating they had been required to focus on the outcome sought from the Program. Whilst the State budget had increased slightly, towards \$900M, there were still not enough funds!

The Minister also undertook to speak with his Ministerial colleagues with respect to streamlining approvals and expediting projects promptly.

It was agreed that a formal submission would be compiled by the Group, covering both general and specific Council issues, and presented to the Minister in the New Year.

REPORT IMPLICATIONS:

- ***Environmental***

Delays in provision of sewerage schemes has a negative impact on the environment.

- ***Social***

Nil.

- ***Economic (Financial)***

The revised funding formula will increase Council's costs for any scheme and the priority ranking for subsidy may mean substantial delays should Council wish to wait for support funding.

- ***Policy or Statutory***

Nil.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

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J A C Hayes
MAYOR