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## Community Update

**Reference:** 101; 102; 103/6  
**Report Author:** Administrator

On Thursday 14 July 2022 the Governor of NSW accepted the recommendation of the Minister for Local Government and declared all Offices in relation to Wingecarribee Shire Council vacant and appointed me as Administrator.

A copy of the Proclamation is attached to this Minute for the record.

Residents will be aware that the former Minister for Local Government on 1 September 2021 outlined a terms of reference and ordered a Public Inquiry into the Council and appointed Mr Ross Glover as Commissioner. The Public Hearings were all conducted in these Chambers and webcasted in March and April this year.

Commissioner Glover's Report, dated 30 June 2022, was recently received by the Minister and has been tabled in the NSW Parliament and will be attached to this Minute for the record.

In accepting the key recommendation that all Civic Offices be declared vacant, the Minister also notified that elections for the new Wingecarribee Shire Councillors will be held on 14 September 2024 aligning with the next Ordinary Council Elections of New South Wales.

A number of recommendations in Mr Glover's Report are industry based, with the Minister indicating she will consider them in due course.

Excepting that it is very comprehensive, I have no further comment to offer on the Report but would urge residents to take the time to review its content, which clearly outlines the reasoning behind the Minister's decision.

The time has now come for us to all move forward for the sake of the future of this Shire.

Community engagement is core to rebuilding of trust and connections in our community and with other key stakeholders. Council has already conducted a range of consultations, most notably my visits to the Villages and Towns, the Executive Listening Tours; consultations associated with the Moss Vale By-Pass, Plasrefine and the Robertson Place Plan. There is a need to provide an ongoing structure for the community to participate in local decision making and be engaged with projects in their place. I have asked the General Manager to bring back to Council, a report no later than the September meeting cycle, on structures that can be put in place to enable this.

Council is presently playing what I can best describe as "catch up" in the strategic land use area planning area and endeavouring to making it easier for residents to deal with Council when they seek alterations or want to build a new home on their land. Residents should not have to fight their neighbours and battle the Council for approvals. Council staff are working very hard with consultants to provide better guidelines in effect, development control plans to assist. Consistency in outcome is required and too much money is wasted in ambit claims and we need a system that in short – follow the rules and get approval. There will be considerable consultations with residents with both high-level land use planning and what I call "mum and dad" applications to ensure that the community expectations are both heard and acknowledged.

In addition to this, the Council's forward financial plan provides expenditure for both new and the renewal of existing infrastructure of half billion dollars over the next 10 years and we must have the

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mechanism in place to ensure residents get both value for money and what they actually need and want.

It is my view that the voice of the community must be heard both at the Councillor level (Administrator) and by the professional officers who actually do the hard yards in preparing the policies and reports for the governing body's consideration.

The Community Strategic Plan is the guiding document for Council and drives the priorities of the Council. The review of this strategic document will be one of the first actions of the incoming Council post the 2024 elections. However, I am mindful that the current document is dated and will need to be refreshed to ensure it is fit for purpose over the 2023 – 2024 financial year. As such, I have asked the General Manager to provide a report to the September meeting outlining an approach that would facilitate this.

Together with the General Manager, I joined over 1,000 Delegates from across the Nation to attend the National Assembly of Local Government in Canberra from the 19 – 22 June. Sunday commenced with the Regional Forum with speakers from the Minderoo Foundation speaking on fire and flood resilience initiatives, as well as a range of other speakers in topics such as leadership during an uncertain climate, regional housing and population challenges and regional tourism post-pandemic. All of these topics are very relevant to the Southern Highlands. Both the content and calibre of speakers at the Forum and Assembly were first class.

A key area of advocacy raised at the National General Assembly, was the importance of the Federal Government's Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program. Since its inception, the Program has provided over \$3.8M to our Shire and delivered the following works:

- Phase 1 - \$1,184,041
  - Church Road Oval Amenities - \$241,000
  - Mittagong SES Refurbishment - \$542,000
  - Eridge Park Netball Court Upgrade - \$80,000
  - Road Resealing Program - \$321,041
- Phase 2 - \$2,133,512
  - Road Resealing Program - \$1,383,512
  - Colo St & Range Rd Upgrade - \$750,000
- Phase 3 - \$2,368,082
  - Old South Road Upgrade - \$2,368,082
- Phase 3 Extension - \$1,184,041
  - Road Rehabilitation Program - \$1,184,041

I have asked the General Manager to write to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, The Hon. Catherine King MP and both Federal Members highlighting the significant benefits delivered to local communities through this program and to advocate for its continuation.

I have been approached by a local resident about the possible renaming of the Bowral Memorial Hall. To date approximately \$3.93M has been spent on the project, with Council receiving a Commonwealth Grant through the Building Better Regions Fund of \$2.8M.

Users of the facility were recently given a site inspection of the work carried out to date and I recently joined the Member for Wollondilly, project staff and the contractor for a viewing.

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While I am loath to become involved in a possible renaming of the facility (as I do not know the origins of the current name), I have asked the General Manager to approach users and residents to see if there is any appetite for a change.

Unfortunately, I must report that Council has been unsuccessful in its endeavours to obtain a \$5M grant from State Government towards the upgrade (internal reconstruction) of the Mittagong Playhouse. That's the bad news, but the good news is that there will be other grant opportunities that Council Officers will continue to pursue.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of Marissa Racamelara in her time at the Council. Marissa answered my call for assistance for three months and ended up staying over a year. Her contribution with getting this Council back on track and dealing with legacy issues, in a fair and reasonable way has been acknowledged to me by a number of residents. Marissa acted as the liaison between the Public Inquiry, undertaken by Commissioner Glover, and the Council and this assistance has been acknowledged in the final report.

The assistance of Messrs Ian Vong and John Crawford is also acknowledged by Commissioner Glover. These gentlemen were behind the technology that allowed a flawless livestreaming of the public hearings, which the report notes had almost 12,000 views across 15 days.

Viv May PSM

**Administrator**