

2005-06 MAYORAL REPORT

"Strengthening Kempsey Shire through relationships"

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1. Overview and Acknowledgements

This report provides a welcome opportunity to review what has been achieved by Council in my fourth term (October 2005 to August 06) as Mayor.

The year under review has been a quite a tumultuous one. As Mayor, and as a member of this Council, there have been times when the barrage of personal and political criticism from some quarters of the community, has been quite overwhelming. Fortunately, there have also been other sections of the community who have been steadfast in their support of Council and its efforts to have the needs of Kempsey Shire addressed and met by all spheres of government.

Important advances have been made in respect of Kempsey Shire Council's political standing within the framework of local government. I was re-elected as Division A representative with the Local Government & Shires' Association and sit on the Planning & Environment committee and the Finance and Economic Development committee for that organisation. I also hold an executive position on the National Seachange Taskforce. All of these positions provide Kempsey Shire Council with the opportunity to be at the cutting edge of local government political decision-making and provide it with a vital information network and valuable resources.

Conjecture from some areas of the community has contributed to doubt about this Council's ability to manage the finances of this Shire. On this matter I am confident that Kempsey Shire Council is being managed as well as most in NSW. To back up these claims I would have you read the report on the Sustainability of Local Government by Professor Percy Allan AM, which identifies some of the issues confronting Kempsey Shire Council as affecting many NSW Councils.

In this past year Council has also benefited by being part of the Local Government 'Promoting Better Practice Program'. This exercise which was conducted by representatives from the Department of Local Government was an extremely valuable process from Council's point of view because it dealt with our specific concerns and operational issues. The most encouraging thing about this report was that the enthusiasm and dedication of our staff was applauded and that we still have goals to aim for to improve our practices.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for attending community events, for being part of various committees when needed, for taking the time to grapple with difficult issues and for trying to make good decisions for this community.

My appreciation goes also to the staff of Kempsey Shire Council who, time and again, show themselves to be people of good humour and dedication.

Finally, thank you to the people of Kempsey Shire who have been so supportive of me in the role of Mayor, even during the most challenging times.



2. Mayor's fact file

The work undertaken in the office of the Mayor is extremely varied, ranging from attending community events and conducting Naturalisation ceremonies to developing regional relationships and lobbying issues of local concern with the State and Federal Government. The facts below provide an indication of what has been involved in managing this workload.

Term of Report: 11 months

Period: October 05 – August 06

Number of Engagements: 179

Naturalisations Conducted: 30

Other Positions

Held:

- Shires' Association 'A' Division Representative
- LGSA Planning & Environment Committee
 - LGSA Finance & Economic Development Committee
- Executive on National Seachange Taskforce

Significant Meetings & Summits attended:

- * North Coast NSW Regional Tourism (*October 2005*)
- * Shires Association Executive meeting
(*October, November, December 2005 May, July, August 2006*)
- * Country Mayors Association & Pacific Highway Taskforce
(*November 2005, March, June, August 2006*)
- * Mid North Coast Group of Councils
(*November 2005 March, May, August 2006*)
- * National Seachange Taskforce (*November 2005, June 2006*)
- * Meeting with Minister for Local Government, Kerry Hickey (*May 2006*)
- * Cultural Awards (*May 2006*)
- * Climate Change Forum (*May 2006*)
- * Meeting with Minister for Lands, Tony Kelly (*June 2006*)
- * Local Government Awards (*August 2006*)
- * Tourism Awards Presentation (*August 2006*)

Conferences & Seminars attended:

- * Local Government Association Conference (*October 2005*)
- * Australian Local Government Association Conference (*November 2005*)
- * Shires' Association "A" Division Conference (*February 2006*)
- * National Seachange Taskforce Conference (*April 2006*)
- * Strategic Alliance Network Conference (*May 2006*)
- * Local Government Managers Australia Forum & Shires Association Conference (*June 2006*)
- * Local Government Planning & Environmental Law Seminar (*July 2006*)

3. Community

a) Naturalisations



People who are granted Australian Citizenship are required to attend a citizenship ceremony. One of the responsibilities of the Mayoral role is to officiate at such ceremonies. I have been privileged to conduct 30 naturalisations in the past year. Each ceremony is special and I have met some wonderful people through this process.

Left: The Mayor with new Australian Citizen, Jackie Roberts shortly after the completion of her naturalisation ceremony.

b) Australia Day 2006



Kempsey Shire's Australia Day 2006 Ambassador was well-known entertainer Peter Cousins (pictured) who sang a wonderful rendition of the National Anthem before an audience of around 300 people at the Australia Day Awards Ceremony at the Kempsey Macleay RSL. He also spoke about what being Australian means to him and sang 'I still call Australia Home'.

Australia day awards were presented to: South West Rocks Arts Council (Community Arts, Entertainment and Music Award), Kempsey West Rotary (Community Service Award), Hector McMillan (Sports Award), Tammy Wicks (Young Citizen of the year), Vincent Cook and Trevor Hannam (Citizen of the Year Achievement Awards), and Don Wade (Citizen of the Year).

c) Macleay Valley Community Art Gallery

The Macleay Valley Community Art Gallery at Gladstone Hall was officially opened at a formal ceremony on Friday 28 October 2005. Development of the gallery was made possible by funding from the Department of Transport and Regional Services under its Regional Partnership programme, the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts and Kempsey Shire Council. The Gladstone community and the Hall's user groups also played a vital role in bringing the project to



fruition.



The Gallery Management Committee is made up of interested community members, artists and Council representatives including Councillor Betty Green. In particular, the tireless work of Council's Community Project Co-ordinator, Barbara Huntington, must be acknowledged. Barbara has put in many long hours leading up to and since the gallery was opened to make sure its exhibitions run without a hitch.

Among the successful exhibitions held at the Macleay Valley Community Gallery in Gladstone since October were the International Women's Day Exhibition held in March and the Textile Exhibition and Workshop held in early June.

The gallery is staffed by volunteers and is open four days a week, Thursday to Sunday, from 10am until 4.30pm. A calendar of exhibitions and events coming to the gallery is available on Council's website.

3. Community (Continued)

d) Community Based Heritage Study

The Macleay Valley Historical Society prepared a study of the thematic history of the Shire on behalf of Council, which was presented to Council's Heritage committee in mid 2004. Additional funding from NSW Heritage Office, matched by Council allowed the study to be developed further. During the past 12 months community meetings have been held on the Community Based Heritage Study, the document has been publicly exhibited and Council has conducted a works inspection of sites listed in the study.

An important benefit for items listed in the heritage study is that they may be eligible for grant funding for restoration works and benefit from the heritage incentive provision, which provides that a heritage item may be used for any land use, subject to consent, if this will enable restoration and conservation of the item.

The protection of heritage items will provide links to local heritage values, provide identity to localities, villages and towns and contribute to the amenity of places in the shire. There are still many decisions to be made about the implementation of the heritage study.

e) Customer First Centre

Council's commitment to becoming a more customer-focussed organisation has never been more evident than in the opening of the Customer First Centre. The centre opened, first in a temporary location in the former Rates section of Council in October 2005, and later moved into its permanent home in Tozer Street in March 2006.

Change is never easy. For staff and customers, alike, the changes experienced in systems since the introduction of Customer First have taken some getting used to. Every problem experienced is being used to refine and improve systems and processes so that the centre can perform at an optimum level for its customers. During the short time the Customer First Centre has been open (not yet 12 months) it has endured more than its fair share of criticism. Despite this, staff have continually worked to improve operations and to resolve as many customer queries as possible at first contact.



The customer first ideal is an investment in the long term well-being of our Shire. I believe the Centre will improve information exchange between Council, ratepayers and residents providing as it does an efficient and direct link to Council.

f) School & Student Visits to Council

It has been very pleasing to see a high level of interest from schools and students in the running of our local council. In the past year Council has enjoyed visits from various schools including Millbank Primary School (*below left*) and excursions have been organised for senior classes at both Melville High School and St Pauls College. I also had the privilege of being interview by Jacob Martin (*below right*), an enterprising young primary school student who wanted to know what it was like to be Mayor.



3. Community (Continued)

g) Hay to Junee

Macleay residents and farmers responded generously after major bushfires swept through 30,000 hectares of rural land near Junee destroying homes, crops and as many as 20,000 sheep and cattle. Local farmers banded together to send loads of fodder on trucks to help Junee farmers feed their livestock.

Barry Ramke and the local NSW Farmers Association are to be commended for co-ordinating the fodder collection. Thank you to everyone who responded so generously to the call of support for the victims of the Junee bushfires.

h) Library

Council's Shire Libraries again maintained a high level of service provision for residents and ratepayers. In particular I would like to acknowledge their efforts to bring our community together through the activities they organise throughout the year. Events organised have included the History week lecture, school holiday activities for the children, the 'Loud in the Library' sessions for the youth and more recently the talk given by Susannah Fullerton, the president of the Jane Austen Society.



Last September, I was honoured to present the prizes for the Limerick Competition (pictured), which was organised by Kempsey Library in conjunction with the Kempsey Writers Group. Young and old alike shared in reading humorous poems and limericks before a rapt audience.

The library recently received two grants to improve its facilities and resources for young people, which is a tribute to the efforts of the staff to involve different sections of the community in its activities.

i) Awards presented to Council

- Macleay Water was recognised at the 2005 Integrated Water Cycle Management Leader at the NSW Energy and Water Green Globe Awards.

- The Macleay Valley Coast won 3 awards and gained 11 highly commendeds in the 2005 Clean Beach Challenge Awards. Horseshoe Bay Beach won the Local Government Leadership Award and the Conservation and Waste Management Award. Grassy Head Beach won the Friendly Beach Award

- Kempsey Shire Council's litter prevention strategy at South West Rocks has won the 2006 Tidy Towns BIEC Litter Prevention Award in Category D (4001 to 10,000 people). South West Rocks was also highly commended in the Friendly Town category. The Award presentation is pictured right.



- West Kempsey Community Renewal Project was recognised for its work in suicide prevention in the local community. Co-ordinator Mavis Symonds was presented with a 'Community Life Award' by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC, Governor of NSW at Government House in Sydney in September 2005.

- Council's Road Safety Program won an Excellence in Road Safety award for its Aboriginal Licensing project and was also highly commended for the Mid North Coast Nightrider late night bus service.

3. Community *(Continued)*

j) Community Events

i) Crocfest 2005

In September 2005 Kempsey hosted one of the most successful Crocfest's ever held. It injected \$220,000 into the Kempsey economy.

Sixty-seven schools between Nambucca Heads and Nowra attended the festival with 4,300 young people participating in 80 fun and interactive sessions promoting positive and healthy lifestyle messages.



Crocfest will be held in Kempsey again in the next few weeks (19-21 September 2006).

ii) Riverside Tastes & Sounds Festival

Another successful festival was held in May 2006, the second annual Riverside Tastes and Sounds Festival. The well-attended event, held in brilliant sunshine with a wonderful atmosphere, was a gathering of cuisine, art, culture and music.

iii) Heritage Festival 2006

In April this year, for the first time, Kempsey Shire Council participated in the National Trust of Australia (NSW) Heritage Festival. Kempsey Shire Council joined with Port Macquarie Hastings Council to share resources to participate in the festival, which ran under the theme "Industrial Heritage – our working lives". It is hoped that this association will develop into bigger and better things in future years.

iv) Know your Heart Seminar

In June 2006 I was fortunate to attend the West Kempsey Community Renewal Program "Know your Heart" Seminar at the Wombat Beach Resort in Crescent Head. The keynote speaker at the seminar, Professor Chris Semsarian from the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's Centenary Foundation addressed the important issue of "Sudden Death in Young People".



v) Seniors Luncheon

Another successful Seniors Luncheon was held in April 2006 during seniors week. Three hundred and eighty of the valley's Seniors attended the event, which was funded cooperatively between Council, the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and the Kempsey Macleay RSL Club.

It is an event Council enthusiastically supports every year. It's great to see our older citizens enjoy themselves through this type of get together. It was even lovelier to see the enthusiasm of the Food Technology students from Melville High School and St Pauls College who assisted Council Staff in making the day a huge success.



Left: Council's Road Safety Officer, Mark Thompson challenged me to lead by example during Bike Safety Week and I had a lovely morning cycling with this avid group of ladies.

4. Regional & Government

a) Mid North Coast Group of Councils

In the past 12 months Council has continued to develop strong relationships within the Mid North Coast Group of councils (MIDGOC). Strong inter-council alliances and resource sharing have been identified, by the Local Government Inquiry, as one of the best ways councils can continue to provide better value for every ratepayer dollar.

During this period Council referred the following issues for inclusion on the MIDCOC agenda:

- Police numbers in the Mid and Far North Coast areas
- Upgrading of the Pacific Highway, in particular adding support to the Pacific Highway Taskforce initiated by the North Coast Group of Councils (NOROC).
- Inadequate funding for Mental health and Suicide Prevention in NSW.
- The development of a regional-based sustainability strategy.
- Voluntary conservation agreements

People addressing the MIDGOC group since December 2005 have included:

- Paul Hernage (Regional Director of the Department of Sport and Recreation)
- Richard Holloway (Regional Art Development Officer)
- John Rooth (Chairperson Mid North coast area Disability Committee)
- Christine Hyde (Manager Film Mid North Coast)
- Brian Stokes (Regional Marketing Manager/Executive Officer North Coast NSW Tourism)
- Marg Mottee (Customer First Manager Kempsey Shire Council)
- Chris Ryan (Economic Development Officer, Greater Taree City Council)

Council's support of the MIDGOC group was backed up at a meeting of the Strategic Alliance Network in Sydney on 1 May 2006. Addressing the meeting, the Minister for Local Government, Kerrie Hickey, reinforced the need for councils to co-operate with each other and to resource share to generate efficiencies and increased service levels.

b) Pacific Highway Taskforce

The Pacific Highway by-pass of Kempsey is of vital economic significance to this valley. As a result I attended the inaugural meeting of the Pacific Highway Taskforce in Sydney on 25 November 2005. This taskforce is made up of Mayors of Councils (mainly in the Northern Rivers, Mid North Coast and Hunter Regions) supporting the upgrading of the Pacific Highway to a dual carriageway standard within 10 years, as well as the NRMA.

The purpose of the taskforce is to lobby the State and Federal governments to devise a mechanism for funding the upgrade and to make it happen within 10 years.

c) Local Government & Shires' Association (LGSA)

The Local Government Association of NSW and the Shires Association of NSW represents 152 Councils in NSW. It is the peak local government body and its major function is to present Councils' view to governments and to provide industrial relations and specialist services to councils.

In early June Councillors and the General Manager attended the Shires' Association Conference. Topics covered included protection of the environment and the development of local economic initiatives

Council used the conference to successfully put forward motions relating to lobbying the State and Federal Government for more funding for mental health, suicide prevention and general health services in NSW; and the Caravan Park Levy Scheme.

4. Regional & Government *(Continued)*

d) National Seachange Taskforce

Kempsey is a member of the National Seachange Taskforce. I am one of two executive members representing NSW. The 2006 conference, which I attended, aimed at presenting innovative strategies to address the environmental, social and economic impact of population growth in coastal areas.

At the conference I participated in a panel discussion on the provision of infrastructure to meet the rapid growth being experienced by seachange Councils.

The benefits for Kempsey Shire Council to be part of this taskforce are:

- the opportunity to exchange information and ideas with coastal councils experiencing similar challenges.
- the opportunity to share the costs of ground breaking research into seachange issues;
- being part of an advocacy program that has placed seachange issues on the political agenda and initiated a collaborative approach between state and federal governments to address the issue.

Major issues identified in seachange communities are the effect of an ageing population, high unemployment, low tertiary education rates, over natural resource use, tourism impacts, lack of community trust, housing affordability and lack of infrastructure provision. Another issue is managing the expectations of people moving into new coastal communities from metropolitan areas,

The information gained through Council's association with organisations such as the National Seachange Taskforce is shared with local Councillors, Council Staff and, where appropriate, Council's strategic alliance colleagues such as the MIDGOC group.

e) Lobbying Role

One of the most important duties of the Mayoral role is to lobby State and Federal Government on issues of concern to the community. This was effectively illustrated during a visit to the area by the Hon. Tony Kelly, Minister for Lands in June 2006. A number of issues of community concern were discussed during his visit including:



- ***Horseshoe Bay Plan of Management***

Towards the end of 2005 the draft Plan of Management was exhibited and a public meeting, held in January 2006, was well attended with the overwhelming majority of those attending wanting the caravan park to continue operation in its present format. Community concerns about the proposed changes were passed onto the Minister. The outcome was that the plan for more cabins was withdrawn and current arrangements at Horseshoe Bay would be maintained.

- ***SWR Boatman's Cottages***

The Minister advised that although the Boatman's Cottages will be rented to community groups at minimum rent, the Pilot's Cottage will be commercially let to pay for the subsidisation of the Boatman's Cottage.

- ***Goolawah Reserve and Grassy Head/Stuarts Point Reserve***

The Minister advised it was no longer necessary for the Dept of Lands to transfer lands to National Parks to protect the environment. A \$100,000 grant has been made available to prepare a Plan of Management for Goolawah and other reserves under Department of Land and Council control.

4. Regional & Government *(Continued)*

f) Inquiry into the Sustainability of Local Government in NSW

The Local Government Shires' Association commissioned the Independent Inquiry into the Financial Sustainability of NSW Local Government, which was chaired by Professor Percy Allan AM. The final report and its recommendations present the findings of one of the most comprehensive reviews of Local Government ever undertaken in NSW.

The major challenges for Local Government in NSW are an infrastructure funding crisis, inadequate revenue bases, skills shortages and the increasing demands placed on local government by the community and other spheres of government. This report reinforces the fact that Kempsey Shire Council is not alone in the struggles it faces in funding the maintenance of high quality infrastructure for its residents and ratepayers.

The importance of this report is quite momentous in that it has drawn attention to issues facing local government throughout NSW. These issues and concerns are now firmly on the political agenda and can no longer be denied at State and Federal Government level.

Professor Percy Allan AM addressed the Shires Association Conference held in Sydney on 6 & 7 June 2006, giving an overview of the inquiry's findings.

g) Local Government 'Promoting Better Practice Review'

In November 2005, Council welcomed the opportunity to have Angus Broad and Lyn Brown from the Department of Local Government conduct a review of its practices as part of the 'Local Government Promoting Better Practice' program. The final report of the review team was issued in February 2006 and is available to the public on Council website (www.kempsey.nsw.gov.au, go to Communications, Documents under 'L').

The purpose of this type of review is to act as a 'health check' for Council. It identified where Council is performing well and where Council needs to improve its practices.

The General Manager and myself lobbied intensively to have Kempsey included in the review program as we both felt it would be an excellent opportunity to see how Kempsey Shire Council measured up to the standards set by the Department of Local Government.

Areas of strength identified by this report:

- Enthusiasm of staff to improve and surmount challenges
- Council's strong strategic approach to meeting future needs of the community
- Council's strong information technology platform
- Council's good governance framework

Areas for improvement identified by the report:

- The need to adopt a formal asset maintenance and management program and to review land use planning
- The need to work on risk management and internal control activities, council meeting practices and records management.

An action plan is now in place to improve these areas of Council's operations.

Overall, I was very pleased with the results of this review. As expected several areas were identified which Council can work at but, importantly, there were also many areas where Council is performing well.