

EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL

PUBLIC FORUM

All members of the community who have registered have been advised that they have a **maximum of seven minutes** to put their case.

Ordinary Meeting of Council on **25 February 2020**

Name	Subject/Comments
Public Forum – 9.30am	
Coral Anderson on behalf of Peter Coggan	CCS20/007 Batemans Bay Regional Aquatic, Arts and Leisure Centre

My name is Peter Coggan representing Our Towns Our Say re Agenda Item CCS20/007 –. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Many of you would be aware that Our Towns Our Say grew out of a small group that formed in August 2017 called Fight for Batemans Bay's 50m Pool. We have held eight public meetings, including a "Pack the Pool" event, on community issues across the Shire with attendances of up to 120 people per meeting.

Eurobodalla Shire Council staff should be congratulated on raising the amazing amount of \$55m for this project but the great fear is that this is not enough and we do not have the business case that supports its sustainability into the future.

In the space of seven minutes, one can hardly touch the tip of the iceberg in what has become a saga of immense proportions. I suppose one could envisage Councillors as the Titanic and this recommendation could actually be the iceberg that brings about its sinking. You can continue to rearrange the deck chairs at your own peril. 2020 elections are on the radar. Councillors, you are part of the iceberg

The following points will support my contention that this recommendation before you is a bad decision.

1. It pre-empted the delivery of a project that has not been fully researched.
2. It presents as a DA that has not been approved and without an updated viable business case.
3. There are too many holes in the recommendation – it leaks like a sieve. I can only touch on the sensitive points that support the fact that you should not approve this recommendation.

It's significant to note that Council has chosen to identify the new complex as an evacuation centre. It is noted that this has not been signalled to the wider community and nor has the cost of updating that centre to serve this purpose been publicly advertised. It would appear that this is once again symptomatic of not consulting the community and surely, the DA for the complex should now be returned to the public forum for consideration.

Can each councillor here honestly say that they have given this project his or her full "due diligence" that it merits? I put it to you that you have not!

I invite you to rewind the video ten years and you will find difficulty in identifying community consultation although you have identified it on this agenda item. If the Director is referencing the Batemans Bay Indoor Aquatic Centre Committee as the go to community representative body he is mistaken. Many individuals and groups were marginalised and not consulted at the direction of a senior director (we have documentation to prove this). Council chose to talk with exclusive groups and exclude targeted swimming groups from meeting with the architects for example of Plan D which is now the DA.

Key point on the DA is that it has not been approved, therefore Councillors, isn't this a case of being a "blind date" in that you and especially the public have not been informed of the indicative costs of the project and the recurrent ongoing costs to the ratepayers into the future. Surely if you are responsible representatives, you must show an honest paper trail and be accountable for the expenditure of public moneys. Point in case here is we don't even have the Mini Golf aspect fully resolved. There is an indication that it is going to cost a further \$2m to buy out the lease which has a further 2 years to run. So, my maths indicate that, including the \$4m already borrowed, we will be

left with \$49m for the project. Given that the Otium case is based on very rubbery figures which were promised to be updated by the General Manager but hasn't happened, Councillors how can you approve expenditure based on such a flimsy basis.

Maybe you have a windfall that we don't know about eg Southern Phones. We are looked on as being parrots on the outside of the biscuit tin looking in but everything is 'commercial in confidence' and based on unsubstantiated facts.

Councillors, if you pass this, you are approving of and opening a can of worms, it would be like giving someone your credit card to your bank accounts and no auditor or accountant or financial adviser or level headed thinking member of the community would even consider it. The key point here Councillors is that you're exposing the Eurobodalla Shire's achilles tendon.

All in all, this project has become a fiasco built on secrecy. The first error that you made, Councillors, was not consulting the community in the first instance. You allowed directors to dictate the brief to consultants, Otium who produced concept plans 1 and 2 in which the case was built to eliminate Batemans Bay's 50m pool without consultation with the community. From that point on, Council's case was built on deception and a cover up and from then on the inclusion of a 50m was disallowed, on the vote of six councillors who blatantly betrayed the community and sealed the fate of Batemans Bay's 50m Olympic pool.

So, Councillors, the basic premise wasn't about 50m or 25m pool but instead it was about the undemocratic process and the people were never consulted. Had a simple survey been run "Do you want a heated 50m or a 25m indoor pool" we would have been singing from the same hymn sheet. Other inclusions could have been added eg performing arts facilities, depending on the availability of funds. Well may you say Councillors that your directors have consulted the community, the facts are that they have not. And the facts are that the funding is not really available in an updated business case and the DA has not been approved. Nor has this matter been brought before the Southern Planning Panel at a public meeting. The community awaits this announcement and the opportunity to present.

So, Councillors, how can this recommendation be resolved in the affirmative if there is so much unfinished business. Councillors, it is unwise to allow this recommendation as it stands to be passed. In fact, the actual blow out of this project has been estimated by some to be in the vicinity of a total of approximately \$80m and, given that we have the addition now of the complex being touted as an evacuation centre (does this mean that Meals on Wheels be allowed to operate from this centre too!!!) and we have had the gym expanded by some 200 square metres without consultation and we've had a Royal Life Saving audit issued, indicating allegedly that the DA does not comply The RLS Risk Assessment manager has carried out a desk audit on the current DA pending approval and this should be made public. If the dimensions of the pools do not comply under Health and Safety regulations, then they should be changed. Councillors, you are responsible for ensuring that the inclusions in the complex comply.

Councillors, there are too many doubtful areas associated with this saga and even if we go back to the beginning when the bowling club was purchased without public consultation (and we still don't know why it was bought apart from a comment by the General Manager that it was a 'strategic' purchase), the swimming community was misled. As you know, the complex was planned to be built at Hanging Rock, then, without implementation or further public consultation, it was moved to the current swimming club site. Council sought Expressions of interest from the public seeking views on redevelopment of the bowling club site with absolutely no intention of including this area in the overall development of the Aquatic/Arts centres.

Is it feasible? Is it affordable? The wording in the agenda about the likely capital cost blow-out and about other possible actions would indicate there is a significant level of thought in council that the answers to these questions is a big "NO"! If this is the case, then how it will be paid for, particularly the size and timing of any required Special Rate Variation, would need to be known and made public to canvass support before proceeding with a request for a rate increase and, of course, there would have to be some assurance from the state government that any such SRV application would be approved if/when made. These actions must occur before authorising any further expenditure on the project, before the tender process is continued and certainly before making any commitment to proceed.