

EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL

PUBLIC FORUM

Ordinary Meeting of Council on 21 May 2024

Please refer to the minutes of the [Council Meeting](#) for outcomes of the agenda items.

Name	Subject/Comments	Presentation Provided	Hybrid
Brett Stevenson, Co-Convenor, A Better Eurobodalla	GMR24/004 Mid-Point Review - Mogo Trails and Coastal Headlands Walking Trail	Yes	In person
Pamela Green	PSR24/009 Draft Housing Strategy	Yes	In person

ABE Presentation on GMR24/004 Mid-Point Review - Mogo Trails and Coastal Headlands Walking Trail.

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to address Council regarding **GMR24/004 Mid-Point Review - Mogo Trails and Coastal Headlands Walking Trail**

I am presenting as Co-Convenor of A Better Eurobodalla (ABE), a community forum dedicated to having open and inclusive government in our region. ABE expects that before governments, at any level, make decisions that will impact their communities, they will undertake broad and meaningful consultation, listen to and share expert advice, and proceed using a transparent decision-making process so that the community understands who makes decisions, when and why.

ABE has taken a sustained interest in Council's governance and management of major grants projects, reflected in multiple written enquiries and presentations to Council, including a presentation in August 2023 on the Review of the Bay Pavilions. ABE also made a submission to the NSW Government Public Accountability Committee examining public grant processes.

After inspecting the mid-term review, ABE offers the following observations :

- 1) The external review is a welcome step in providing the community with insights regarding the current status of these two projects. It has identified significant financial risks arising for Council and the Eurobodalla community as both projects move into operational mode, and offers options to address or reduce these problems.
- 2) The review's suggestion for the creation of dedicated project management skills and resources within Council is a worthwhile initiative, and echoes similar recommendations made in the Bay Pavilions Review in August 2023. ABE supports this recommendation
- 3) While the review has provided useful suggestions on how to minimise the emerging financial and related risks arising from these 2 grant projects, it provides no substantive insight into how Council and Eurobodalla ratepayers came to be in our current predicament. The review exhibits a puzzling lack of curiosity in how these 2 major financial dilemmas developed, and lacks any comprehensive documentation regarding information sources and stakeholders contributing to the review. In this respect, this review is lamentably similar to the Bay Pavilions review. For those who say that past events should be ignored as we look to the future, I offer the enduring advice :

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

4) The lack of documentation regarding the Review's sources and stakeholders is a critical weakness, as it makes it impossible to evaluate what community input (if any) has gone into this review, and what degree of community transparency has been applied in the development of these projects. It is the lived experience of ABE and other interested community members that it has been difficult, if not impossible at times, to get accurate and up to date information regarding either of these projects. For example, the reduction of the Coastal Walking Trail length from 33km to 14.5 km was never formally announced – it just mysteriously occurred without any explanation being provided. Given this track record, it is paradoxical that most of the potential solutions suggested by the Review involve much greater community involvement, in order to reduce the impacts on Council resources and staffing. If Council is serious about enlisting greater community involvement in these projects, it is essential that it communicates the current circumstances of each project frankly and fully to the community.

5) The Review's dismissal of Council's lack of understanding of the whole of life cost of the Mogo Adventure Trails as an "*unfortunate oversight*" strains the reader's credibility. Whole of life costing is "Project Management 101", and is fundamental to the development of any sort of business case. It is particularly puzzling in the case of Mogo Adventure Trails, as the initial \$3 million Growing Local Economies grant stipulated requirements for submission of both a business case as well as "*information on how the project will be operated and/or maintained upon completion*".

6) There is an elementary but non-trivial mathematical error concerning the maintenance cost of Mystic Ranges on page 15 of the Review. The review indicates the cost per kilometre as \$1,400, when it should in fact be \$14,220 per kilometre (i.e. an error factor of 10). This translates to a cost per metre of \$14.22, in comparison with the \$1.50/metre cost initially quoted by Dirt Art, the Mogo track designers. If the Mystic Range figure were applied to the Mogo complex, it would generate an annual maintenance cost of \$2.133 million. The escalating estimated maintenance costs per metre are a significant risk factor for the 155 km of Mogo trails, having gone from \$1.50 (Dirt Art), \$2.15 (draft Mogo Trails Adventure Plan) to \$4.00/metre in the current review.

7) The Mid-Point Review corroborates ABE's submission to the Public Accountability Committee that the Coastal Headland Walking Trail project was not in a "shovel" ready" state when granted \$5.25 million of BLER (Bushfire Local Economic Recovery) grant funding in 2021, despite this being one of the key requirements stipulated for this program. This unsatisfactory state of affairs reflects poorly on both the grant provider and the grant applicant.

It is of great concern to ABE and many other community members that three large Public Funding grants (totalling more than \$84 million) have become current or imminent ongoing financial and/or resources black holes for Council and its ratepayers. The forces that facilitated these financially "poison pill" grants are still with us, and the community needs to be vigilant to ensure that history does not repeat itself. The recommendations outlined in the Mid-Point

review, if fully and rigorously implemented, can make a significant contribution to avoiding such errors in the future.

The long term negative financial implications from the Mogo Adventure Trails and Coastal Headlands Walking Trail projects, on top of the already disclosed financial burden arising from the Bay Pavilions Aquatic Centre, underscore the critical need to pursue the good governance and transparency objectives that ABE has consistently been putting forward to Council for over 3 years.

Thank you for your attention.

Dr Brett Stevenson
Co-Convenor
A Better Eurobodalla
21/5/2024

Presentation by Pamela Green to Eurobodalla Shire Council 21/05/2024

Good morning, Mr Mayor and Councillors and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning about the Eurobodalla Housing Strategy and allied land use planning matters.

I want to commend Eurobodalla Shire Council for seeking ways to respond to the housing crisis that has been created by other levels of government over many decades of reduced investment in public housing and the creation of tax and other incentives that have changed the housing market from one providing a human right of shelter to that of housing being a commodity and an investment vehicle.

I note in the background documents and in the draft Eurobodalla Housing Strategy before you, that it is not the lack of land zoned for residential purposes, nor the timeliness of the planning process within Council which is causing or exacerbating the issues. A key element in the complex housing crisis in Eurobodalla, and one that Council can influence from a planning perspective, is that of addressing the lack of a wider variety of housing types to meet the diverse needs and affordability thresholds of the community. Again, this has been driven by other levels of government. The dismantling of long-term residential options in caravan parks and the change in regulation of boarding houses are just a couple that come to mind.

There are a range of solutions discussed in the background document and an essential step of including the community in master planning for the three main centres of Batemans Bay, Moruya and Narooma is identified in the strategy as part of this process. As you know, people are often busy with their own lives and do not take note of changes in planning until it directly affects them. An extended period of exhibition would give more time for Council to raise awareness of the intended shift in policy and get more community involvement. Genuine consultation with the community about place-based planning is a time and resource consuming process, I know because I was part of it when it was rolled out in part of the Eurobodalla by the NSW Government in the 1990s, but it can also be rewarding and help people feel they have some control over their built environment.

Communities that live across this Shire in smaller inland and coastal villages are also feeling the pressure, as lands zoned for residential and various forms of environmental living are developed. Sometimes these are what are known as zombie developments and sometimes rezonings that appear to many, to have been approved despite strong, well-founded objections from the community and referral authorities.

I know you are deeply aware of the traumatic impact that the bushfires, floods, and the pandemic have had on the community. I want to raise with you, the level of anxiety and feelings of powerlessness felt by many people in our community about the impacts of climate change and the ongoing human generated threats to the high levels of biodiversity that make Eurobodalla such a special place.

Someone once described it to me as like having tinnitus of the soul. An underlying level of dread, a deep sadness about the environmental legacy they will be leaving. When development proposals arise in communities for the many people who feel such a strong affinity to the landscape and all the interconnected life within it, the level of anger, anxiety and feelings of despair can be overwhelming.

It is easy to dismiss their concerns as nimbyism but that shows a massive disrespect for the depth of their understanding and connection to their environment and often lived past and present experience, and professional qualifications in the relevant fields.

It is they who have asked me to come and speak to you today, to let you know they are feeling stressed and worried. They want to reiterate the values held in the Community Strategic Plan which records the aspirations of the community for their Council to enable. They ask that in the work you are doing across the planning portfolio which is made up of a myriad of parts including the Eurobodalla Housing Strategy you are also mindful of what the community believes are promises held in the LEP and other allied planning documents, that support protection of the environment across the shire and to highlight their concerns about proposals for areas that have been zoned or rezoned for environmental living.

C4 zonings recognise the high level of environmental importance of an area. They are often in areas of high bushfire risk due to topography and vegetated structure. To knowingly continue to allow more people and property to place themselves in harm's way as the effects of climate change bite more deeply in flood prone and unprotectable bushfire prone areas is concerning. The zoning legislation and bushfire protection measures provide safeguards to protect the environmental values and function and the safety of residents, emergency services and built assets but only if the agreed rules are faithfully applied to meet the intent. These are the decisions your community has elected you to make on their behalf and they want to trust you, but they want you to know that they continue to feel a high level of anxiety about the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Pamela Green