

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 **28 September 2021**

Name	Subject/Comments
Public Forum – 9.30am	
Jim Bright	MR21/005 General Manager's Contract Renewal
David Grace	QON21/007 Services for Eurobodalla's ageing population

ESC MEETING – 28 SEPTEMBER 2021
PUBLIC FORUM PRESENTATION
RE MAYORAL REPORT – MR21/005

My name is Jim Bright. I'm a resident of Narooma.

I'm here today to suggest that there is a considerably simpler and certainly a far more appropriate way to address the mayor's proposal for the council to facilitate the continuation of the employment of the current General Manager, Dr Dale, for an additional period of three months beyond the expiry of her current contract on 30 June 2022 - that is, for an additional period from 1 July 2022 to 30 September 2022.

The Mayoral Report advises that Dr Dale has proposed that this outcome be achieved by now cancelling her existing employment contract and approving a new contract for a period of twelve months from 1 October 2021 (this Friday) to 30 September 2022. (Although it is not explained in the Mayoral Report, the reason why this somewhat convoluted process, of cancelling an existing contract and replacing it with a new contract, would need to be undertaken is because, under s.338 of the Local Government Act, GM contracts must be for a minimum of twelve months.)

However, as I have explained in the discussion paper that I have sent to you in the last day or so, the Local Government Act does provide a way to achieve the same outcome without the need for the administrative complexities of the arrangement that is proposed in the Mayoral Report. That is, s.351 of that Act allows a council to temporarily appoint someone to a GM position for a period of up to 12 months. It is therefore completely feasible for the current contract to continue as scheduled until 30 June 2022 and for Dr Dale then to be temporarily appointed, under s.351, in order to continue in the GM position for the following three months up to 30 September 2022.

But far more importantly (as I explained in my discussion paper), this arrangement would also facilitate the honouring of the long-standing 'caretaker' convention that, wherever possible, employment decisions relating to General Managers should be taken by the councillors to whom a General Manager would be responsible during the period of employment in question. That is, any additional period of employment that will occur between July and September 2022 should, as far as possible, be approved by the councillors who are in place during that particular period – and as I have explained, in this particular case, it would be entirely possible for the councillors who will be elected on 4 December to take a decision during the first half of next year to offer Dr Dale an appointment under s.351 for the required period following the expiry of her current contract.

Therefore, all that actually needs to occur at today's meeting, to enable this alternative process to be instigated at the appropriate time, is simply either

- for Dr Dale to withdraw her recent request for a new contract to be approved, or
- for the councillors to decide that there is, in fact, no compelling and justifiable need to replace the existing contract. In reality, the compelling case is for the current contract not to be replaced.

Thank you.

Presentation on QON21/007 Service for Eurobodalla's ageing population

I was employed by the Council in 1988 as their Aged Care community worker, and over the next six years I worked with very committed community members as well as councillors to build a strong suite of services for elderly people, including the Dr Mackay Community Centre. It is heartening to see council's continuing commitment to one of our largest age groups in the Shire. In fact, Eurobodalla has Australia's 6th highest population of people by percentage aged over 65, and the highest by percentage in NSW (30.5% aged 65+; 12.8% aged 75+).

Source: <https://blog.id.com.au/2020/population/demographic-trends/where-is-the-elderly-population-in-australia/>

When planning services for people in the 65+ age group, we must be aware that we are dealing with a diverse group of people in an age range of up to forty years. To give just a few examples:

- Younger people in this cohort are often in very good health and may be at a stage of their lives where they are able to engage in activities which were not possible when they had family and work commitments.
- Those whose health is failing and need services to maintain their lifestyle.
- Diversity of wealth. Some older residents in our community will be well off, while others may have struggled with poverty all their lives. There is also a significant proportion of older people who begin to experience poverty in their older years, because of inadequate superannuation and pensions- this applies particularly to women, job losses, and expenses connected with illness or disability.
- We also must be aware of cultural differences about growing older, especially with regard to our Aboriginal population.

A mistake that is often made when planning for older people is to assume there is an increased need for "accessible" services for the whole age cohort. This is not the case. If we look at the statistics regarding the need for assistance with core activities, we see that between the ages of 60-75 there is little difference between this age group and the younger cohorts. After the age of 75, there is a clear increase in the need for care services.

(Source: <https://profile.id.com.au/eurobodalla/assistance>)

From these statistics, when we are planning in the long term for the 65+ cohorts, we need to have two different focusses, the first is for a younger cohort who are likely to be healthy and active, with more free time to pursue interests that were not open to them when they were working or raising children, and the second focus on providing well targeted and well provisioned services for the older age groups. Part of this provisioning is to have information services available for those who are transitioning from being independent to needing assistance.

The response to the question on long term planning concentrates very strongly on providing accessible services for the elderly. While this is important, there also needs to be a focus on those in this cohort who are in good health, and do not need accessible services. There is one paragraph on this in the response, but no detail about the long-term planning that this healthy and active cohort of older people might want. In this short presentation I will concentrate on this issue

So what might be some long term planning directions that the shire could put in place for this group?

There needs to be places for older people to meet and pursue their interests. This was a primary focus of the Batemans Bay Community Centre. Services such as the U3A, dance groups and yoga groups as well as the Meals on wheels service used this facility which provided the active services that are so important to older people, as well as the vital Meals on Wheels service for those who need assistance with meals. The Council needs to recalibrate its approach to this and either re-instate the community centre to its previous function or provide other facilities that meet this need for active older citizens. It is not good enough for the Council to disperse these activities into smaller venues which are often not suitable for the activity.

The council needs to be working with community groups such as bushwalking clubs, surf life saving clubs, community progress associations to develop and enhance activities for those 65 and over. This could include providing both financial and in-kind support to increase the activities and involvement of the over 65 age groups in their activities. Community Progress associations could be consulted about activities that could be developed within the many villages of the shire to encourage this age group to be active in their area.

Volunteering is a vital activity which supports many of the council sponsored activities in the Shire, including services for the elderly who need assistance. It is very encouraging to see that the Council has over 700 volunteers providing services ranging from support services to seniors to Landcare. Many of those volunteers would be in the "young old" cohort. This number does not include the volunteers working with emergency services such as the SES and the RFS. The council's support for this important part of our workforce needs to continue as without these volunteers many of these services could not function.

Although superannuation and pensions are Commonwealth issues, the council has to deal with the consequences of years of bad policy that has resulted in increasing poverty and homelessness for many older people, especially women, who often do not have adequate income support because of disrupted careers due to childcare, or family breakups where superannuation is not evenly distributed. At the 2016 Census there were around 120 homeless people living in the Shire, up from 80 in the 2011 Census (source: <https://profile.id.com.au/eurobodalla/highlights-2016?Sex=2&AgeKey=105>)

It is not possible due to these small numbers to get information on age or gender of these people. I have worked with homeless people both professionally and as a volunteer, and my observation is that there are higher levels of women who are experiencing homelessness. This is supported by Australia wide statistics, which show that around 240,000 women aged 55 or older are at risk of homelessness. (source: <https://theconversation.com/400-000-women-over-45-are-at-risk-of-homelessness-in-australia-142906>

<https://www.older tenants.org.au/content/having-ask-for-somewhere-live-its-difficult-indeed-single-female-homeless-australias>).

The Council needs to have a long-term focus on providing low cost and social housing for older people especially those who are in poverty. The response identifies that this may include a

discussion about increasing housing densities in some of the Shire's urban areas. This is a discussion that is needed focussing on how development meets our human requirements. Labor will be pushing for such a discussion if our team is represented on the council. We also need to be effective advocates for our community members who are facing or experiencing homelessness to both State and Commonwealth Governments to get the services they need.

In my previous remarks I have been talking generally about older people. There are two important groups which need special attention. These are the Aboriginal members of our community and people who are culturally diverse.

Aboriginal people have a noticeably shorter life span than the general population and are more likely to have health and disability issues. This is primarily the result of historic abuse and trauma of the Aboriginal communities, including the communities in our Shire who are the traditional owners.

There are a growing number of services for older Aboriginal people. In this response there does not appear to be a mention of whether the council is engaged with these services and how it is working with them. This is an important aspect of providing strong aged care services across the shire, and I hope that more detail can be provided on how the council is working with the Aboriginal aged care services.

Our shire is slowly becoming more culturally diverse, and this will have an effect on the services that will be needed both for our elderly population and for younger people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Because of the small number of people from culturally diverse backgrounds it is a challenge to build viable services to meet this part of our community's needs. This does not mean that it is impossible. There is a strong argument to be made that the council should employ a worker to build connections with the different cultural groups in the shire, and work with them to develop services that are relevant to them.

I would like to finish by supporting point five of this question without notice. Eurobodalla Labor will be supporting the development of a Community Services committee. This was established in the Council around 1993 and was a very successful innovation. It provided the council with the wisdom of community members involved in community services, as well as from other professionals in the area, and provided a forum for discussion about community services and council's involvement.