

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 June 2019

| Name | Subject/Comments | Presentation attached |
|--------------|---|-----------------------|
| Lei Parker | GMR19/011 – 2019-20 Determination of Local Government Remuneration Tribunal | Yes |
| Jude Monahan | GMR19/012 Adoption of the revised 2017-21 Delivery Program and 2019-20 Operational Plan | No |
| Jim Bright | CCS19/025 Code of Conduct - Conduct Reviewers Panel | Yes |

GMR19/011

My name is Lei Parker, resident of Tuross and possibly an *Extreme Green* however this cannot be confirmed as Council's scale of Greens has not been published.

I am neither **For** or **Against** and therefore am **Neutral** as I simply ask Councillors to consider their vote. I speak as a **Neutral** though you appear not to have such a category.

Councillors, today you will be voting on whether you should grant yourselves a 2.5% increase.

It has not gone unnoticed that this decision will be made on the same day you vote to exhibit the latest Fees and Charges fees that have all taken a hike skyward.

The vote for a Councillor and Mayor fee increase is also on the same Agenda that says the annual Ordinary Rates for 2019-20 are to rise 2.7%, the Environment Levy will increase 2.7%, the water consumption charge will increase by 1.3%, the water availability charge will increase by 3.0% and the sewer availability charge will increase by 2.1%.

Businesses across the shire will also be facing increases that no doubt they will have to pass on to consumers.

Many in the Shire are reliant on tourism which has been identified as the primary industry of the region only to recently be overtaken by Aged Care.

The Eurobodalla has seen progressive negative growth which means a loss of business and is reflected in a loss of confidence. All anyone needs to do is to look at the empty shops. This has been on your watch.

While council celebrates a record number of housing approvals we are now in our third negative growth quarter which equates to recession and the increased tourism figures that council offers to the community just don't stack up. There are councillors who have business in tourism who know things are not fine.

While recent prestidigitation of visitor numbers might suggest otherwise, the bank accounts of those at the coal face of tourism are hunkering down to another expected trough as we head into winter. Soon they will learn their rates and charges are to increase 2.7%.

Meanwhile Batemans Bay retail is moving into industrial areas due to issues around customer parking woes and CBD high rentals. Removal of paid parking has done little to stimulate the CBD and the prospect of the four years ahead of CBD disruption offers little confidence. This reflects businesses modifying their financial model to survive.

Yet the community have heard nothing of this from their councillors. Nor have they heard how much the decision of Council to remove paid parking cost the community.

And still you will no doubt press for that allowable 2.5% increase irrespective of having failed to communicate to your community.

In fact the perception of poor Councillor communication has led to a widespread compromise of Councillor's reputation that is more than evident by anecdote and in the media. The once promised public meetings have never been held.

It has also become more than evident that at 90% of Council meetings you ask any Questions on Notice nor bother to post Notices of Motion while your community request you to seek clarity and to have Council's response formally recorded.

With such poor ratings do you honestly believe that the community will support your move to give yourself a 2.5% increase without ratepayer input or challenge?

Even with the commendable injection of State funds and the efforts made by the State member to secure regional funding there is, as yet, no measurable gross regional product shift however things may pick up in the next quarter. Overall though business in the Eurobodalla is doing it tough.

Unemployment however remains high. Additionally many of our residents are on fixed incomes falling outside the net of generous CPI wage increases as enjoyed by the public sector with 3% scheduled for July 1st. For those with rental properties the 3% wage increase will go into meeting the 2.7% rate increase and the allowable 2.5% CPI.

So will you vote yourselves a 2.5% rise today? Is one deserved?

Over the last year what have Councillors actually achieved? Very little in fact. Most of the accomplishment we see in the Shire is a result of the NSW State.

Yes, you have rubberstamped all of the reports and recommendations put before you however you have also pretty much ignored the opinion of those who voted for you and employ you, and who dared challenged your decisions in

Public Forum. Council's reputation under your watch is now at an all time low since the Great Dismissal of 1982.

But still you will vote in favour of the 2.5% rise.

Who pays for Councillor's wage rise? The Ratepayers. Yet they have no say today because you, the Councillors, alone get to vote for it yourselves. No KPI's, No measurement, no public input.

All up the wage rise is a minor thing. The rise will give you another \$480 in your pockets with an additional \$1500 for the Mayor.

Eurobodalla's Mayor receives \$61,430 per year and the councillors receive \$19,310 per year. The Mayor also has a council car provided that is fully paid for by Council including fuel, rego and all running costs. Keeping in mind the Mayor lives in a remote rural area the costs of this vehicle for fuel and running costs are considerable. All up, \$326,000 is currently paid to our Councillors and Mayor in salaries, phone and internet, travel and other.

Yet you will vote for a 2.5% increase.

Further south the Bega Valley councillors have turned down a proposed fee increase for the third year in a row.

Not only will you now demand of the community the extra rates and fees to meet your Operational Plan 2019-2020 but you will also have to find the extra \$5300 a year for your councillors pay rise. And all that comes from the ratepayers purse.

Public Forum is now unseen and unheard with Eurobodalla Council the only council in the South East NSW to do so. There is no-one other than yourselves and those in the gallery that will witness this presentation and your subsequent questions and remarks.

No doubt you will state that 99% of the ratepayers agreed to the rise because only one or two from the community came forward to protest it.

If you are true to form you will most likely pat yourselves on the back and accept the rise for the great job you are doing, as has been the case for the past four years.

But isn't it the ratepayers, the employers, who should make the decision and not YOU.

Council has long been of the opinion that the community endorse everything they do because there is very little protest other than from the "Usual Suspects". It is however those "Usual Suspects", that six or seven that attend Council meetings that hold you to your oath and have bought successive, and successful Codes of Conduct complaints including two recent ones that required an apology and six sessions to improve his communications with ratepayers.

By the actions of some of our present Councillors they have cost the ratepayers tens of thousands of dollars from the ratepayers purse to defend themselves against a surfeit of Codes of Conduct complaints raised by..... ratepayers.

Bega Valley Shire Mayor Kristy McBain told the media last week "It's the biggest conflict of interest we have" saying councillors should not vote on their own pay. She said she had taken the issue up with the Local Government Remuneration Tribunal last year.

What of the Eurobodalla Shire? Do you share Mayor McBain's concerns?

Bega's Cr Seckold was of the opinion that the current pay does not encourage good candidates, and also makes it difficult for underprivileged residents to become involved in local government while

Cr Fitzpatrick said he has voted against a rise during his entire council career, and disagreed with the idea better pay would lure more talented residents.

The last time Eurobodalla councillors turned down the Tribunal's recommended increase was in 2014. At council's 2015 ordinary meeting CIs Harding, Brice and Innes moved to do so again. That was lost with the vote by the majority under Mayor Brown to support an increase. Since then Council have accepted the rise without question.

Councillors, in light of the above, you might like to move that your combined rise be gifted to the local Salvation Army for the homeless of Eurobodalla to assist them to get through the remaining winter months ahead.

EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL

PUBLIC FORUM PRESENTATION – 25 JUNE 2019

AGENDA ITEM CCS19/025 - 'CONDUCT REVIEWERS PANEL'

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

I'm here today to speak about the agenda item relating to the proposal to approve a panel of code of conduct complaint reviewers.

At least some of you will not be surprised to hear that I'm highly in favour of councillors adopting such a panel - for the simple reason that it will finally bring to an end to a period of at least 3 years in which this council has failed to carry out its clear and undeniable legal obligation to have had such a panel in place during that period.

Late yesterday, I forwarded to each of you copies of correspondence that passed between SAFE and the ESC in the latter part of last year relating to the issues around the apparent non existence of the required panel.

You will have noted that, in SAFE's letter to the General Manager dated 4 November 2018, the council's attempt, in its letter of 2 October 2018, at justifying the situation was completely and utterly demolished. The General Manager's response to SAFE dated 23 November 2018 effectively waved a 'white flag' in relation to this matter.

Against that background, it is of considerable concern that the Staff Report, that is before you today, has again tried to portray a scenario in which the ESC was somehow not (for the last three years) in breach of its indisputable legal obligation to have its own panel of conduct reviewers in place.

The purpose of this presentation is therefore to bring the attention of councillors and the community to the fact that the contents of the first two paragraphs of the 'Background' section of the Staff Report' are seriously misleading - and ,worryingly, might be deliberately so.

Let me state categorically – at all times between June 2016 and now, the ESC was legally obliged to have had its own panel of reviewers in place – but it did not do so. At no time was the ESC provided with some type of authorisation to depart of that legal obligation - and the OLG circular that is referred to in the Staff Report **did not** provide the General Manager with any such authorisation.

Councillors should be demanding an explanation from the General Manager in relation to this matter.

Thank you for your time.