

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 **23 February 2021**

Name	Subject/Comments
Lei Parker	GMR21/005 Delivery Program 2017-21 Six Monthly Performance Update July - December 2020

Presentation to Public Forum – Tuesday February 23rd 2021

GMR21/005

Councillors,

I would like to congratulate Council staff on many accomplishments listed in the Delivery Program 2017-21 Operational Plan - 2020-21 - six monthly performance update ranging from July – December 2020

The update before you today bears testament to the dedication of council staff in achieving their KPI's under the most adverse of conditions that required them to quickly develop and adapt to new paradigms.

As the owner of Eurobodalla's leading on-line news outlet, *The Beagle*, I took particular interest in the section of the six monthly performance update, as published, in the area of Communications and Media.

At point 8.1.1.1 of the six monthly performance update before you today, under "Manage media relations and advice and respond to queries" it says, "*Council continues to nurture strong relations with local media. 108 media queries were responded to promptly, with collaboration of staff where appropriate.*"

I must commend the Communications team and endorse that all of the many media queries made by *The Beagle* were dealt with promptly and professionally.

As you can imagine some of the information and clarification sought was controversial or complex. Yet on each enquiry the Communications team provided a timely response with a fulsome reply.

With doubt the Communications team has nurtured strong relations with *The Beagle* and, as such, has enabled the timely communication of Council news to the community via *The Beagle* website, mailouts and social media platforms.

It is also commendable that the Communications team has now gathered an audience of 2,855 Council News subscribers, 14,799 Facebook followers, 2,156 Instagram followers and 73 YouTube followers. To gain such numbers is not an easy task. With each new subscriber, or follower, Council has potential to further communicate and include.

As the editor of *The Beagle* I am very much aware of the role that my publication has in assisting in the dissemination of Council media releases and notices.

As a single issue “publisher” of news Council relies on the wider media framework to convey its message. Council is fortunate that most outlets convey the media releases unedited. This ensures Council maintains control of the narrative.

There are media outlets such as *ABC South East*, *2EC* and *The Beagle* that do edit Council’s media releases and do carry out further research on what is said, and more importantly, what is not. Effective, timely and factual communication is critical to ensure our community remains fully and accurately informed and engaged and it is the media’s role to deliver that.

Before I go on I must make comment on a statement made by the Mayor last week to Simon Lauder of ABC South East when he asked “How much community consultation will there be around the 33km Batemans Bay Walking Trail?”

In her response the Mayor said *“Obviously there will be community consultation around that And look, I caution people with articles going into such blogsites as The Beagle to just be a bit cautious about some of the information that they absorb and read through such outlets such as that”* Liz Innes.

In the context of *Council continues to nurture strong relations with local media* I take this opportunity to remind the Mayor of Eurobodalla Council that *The Beagle* is a registered Australian Media company with a multifaceted website that provides on-line news to the Eurobodalla community from Sth Durras to The Tilbas and is widely read by many of our away-residents and our 40% non-resident ratepayers keen to stay abreast of local news and events.

The Mayor’s suggestion *“to just be a bit cautious about some of the information”* suggests that *The Beagle* is not to be a wholly trusted source of news. Such a comment clearly undermines *“Council continues to nurture strong relations with local media”*.

The Mayor might like to consider that her own personal opinion regarding *The Beagle* should not be aired in public whilst representing Council and her fellow

councillors, many of who do not share her sentiments.

In the four years and over 16,000 published articles in *The Beagle* there has not been a single request to retract anything published by *The Beagle* in regards to articles written about Eurobodalla Council.

My late neighbour, the wonderful Mr Alan Ramsey, once advised me that “one would be a fool to dismiss “*The Beagle*” and an even greater fool to underestimate the reach of *The Beagle* and the sentiment of its readers.”

In response, all I can say to the Mayor is that I take offence at her unwarranted outburst on ABC South East and respond with the following cautionary note to *Beagle* readers.

"And look, I caution people with articles going into Council media releases, quoting the Mayor, to just be a bit cautious about some of the information that they absorb and read through such outlets(Council's website), such as that".

The Beagle website, owned by South Coast Beagle Pty Ltd, as a registered Australian media company, enjoys an average monthly audience of 38,000 and a daily audience of 7,000 with a twice weekly mailout subscription base of 5,800. Until recently it also enjoyed an audience of 11,000 Facebook followers. A work-around to the closure is now in place with *The Beagle* now listed and active on Google NewsSource. Meanwhile the Twitter and Instagram audience builds.

With the closure of the *Moruya Examiner*, and the *Bay Post* and *Narooma News* now being a skeletal reflection of these once substantive local mastheads, I commend the Council's Communication team in becoming a D.I.Y Newsroom, as described by Stuart Howie in his handbook “The Five Steps to Powerful and Strategic Communications Using Your organisation's own resources”.

In all, I commend the Communications team and their accomplishments and look forward to working with them in the future.

Lei Parker.