

Eurobodalla Shire Council

Citizens' Jury Report

Is Council spending our money on the right things?

If not, what should change?

30 November 2016

Introduction

We are pleased to present this report and would like to acknowledge the commitment that has been made by Council in undertaking the Citizens' Jury. We have appreciated the opportunity to learn more about our Council, the work they do, the responsibilities they have and the issues and challenges they face daily. In seeking to respond to the question they provided, we have tried in good faith to reply with frankness. In return, we expect that our recommendations will help shape the future decisions and directions of Council.

Throughout this report we seek to convey a majority view that Council is broadly meeting the needs of the community and therefore is generally spending our money on the right things. We acknowledge the outcomes of the recent local government amalgamations and that the Eurobodalla Shire remains intact. We believe this reflects the ability of the Council to manage resources to preserve our unique community identity. We want this to continue, however, there are a number of areas where we see opportunities for improvement or refinement and have made specific recommendations. These areas are:

- Employment, Economic and Business Development;
- Aboriginal and Broader Community Involvement;
- Community Services;
- Environment and Rural Lands;
- Long Term Vision and Innovation;
- Advocacy and Facilitation;
- Pathways;
- Roads, Rates and Rubbish; and
- Arts Development.

There are also overarching comments we would like to make, firstly around communication and community engagement. We believe this Citizens' Jury is a good indication that Council wants to hear from the community on a variety of issues and we think this is a positive first step towards developing a culture of openness and consultation.

Many jurors acknowledge how much we learnt about Council during this project. This shows how important it is for Council to continue efforts to communicate widely and through a variety of means to ensure that people really know and understand what is being done in our community. We note that the Staff Jury's report also made recommendations around communication and feel this shows the importance of this for future consideration.

We want local people to know about (and be given) the opportunities to contribute to Council decision-making. This Jury was an example of how well Council can engage people actively in making good decisions and not just in presenting us with a pre-determined outcome.

We found the question we were given broad and challenging. It was difficult to express our recommendations in monetary terms and we have sought to avoid presenting this report as a set of wish-list items. We acknowledge the need for Council to make trade-offs given limited resources. While we have not fully articulated specific trade-offs, where we have made recommendations we implore Council to look at any means to innovate to achieve recommended outcomes. Where additional funding may be required we encourage Council to explore and engage with the community around generating additional income or reducing expenditure.

With regard to federal, state and local government responsibilities, we acknowledge that this is a highly complex area and difficult for us as non-experts to navigate. We have sought to shape our

recommendations based on our understanding of Council's role. We ask that Council accept the intent of what we are trying to achieve. Where it may transpire that our recommendations relate to other tiers of government, Council should advocate on our behalf if direct action is not possible.

Across all our discussions, there was a common theme of the value we place in the natural environment. We have consistently placed this at the heart of our deliberations and Council should embrace this core value in their own day-to-day operations. We also note that Council must be mindful of a quadruple bottom line (environment, social, economic and culture) when making their decisions.

We must acknowledge the importance of the local Aboriginal community and sought to have their additional input but recognise the cultural challenges around engagement with this important part of our community. This demonstrates the need for respectful consultation with Aboriginal people. We acknowledge there was no Aboriginal Jury member.

We note that there some areas which are important for the local community where we have not had opportunity to fully deliberate (due to time constraints or access to adequate information) to the level where we felt comfortable making definitive recommendations. We note these areas to include (but are not limited to):

- Future direction of the Moruya Airport;
- Provision of disability services and other accessibility issues;
- Public transport; and
- Specific capital works and infrastructure projects such as the Batemans Bay Pool.

The jury would like to make special mention concerning the lack of depth of our considerations on the topic of disability services. This is an oversight that the jury sincerely regrets. As we reached our final sessions, this oversight became apparent and while some attempt was made to examine this area, it was decided that we lacked the time to give it the consideration it deserved. We hope this serves as a reminder to us all how easily a section of our community can become invisible and how we must all charge ourselves with the duty of ensuring everyone is represented in community consultation efforts. Where we could, we have tried to acknowledge the needs of disability services within the other topics on which we have made recommendations.

In relation to public transport, we note as a general view that we believe this is an area of great importance that is underserved.

There are also several issues on which we could not come to agreement. We trust that Council will understand that these issues are divisive, contentious and ongoing. Council is advised to provide safe fora for the free exchange of views on these issues by the community with the view to achieving further clarity and hopefully eventual consensus.

Specifically, this included the issue of flying fox dispersal and approval for the Huntfest event. In relation to these two issues, the Jury has only made one recommendation, however we note in principle the diverse opinions around both matters. Both issues demonstrate the need for high quality community engagement and for consideration of potential environmental impacts above all else.

We would encourage Council to review or develop (and then communicate) a clear set of criteria for approval of local events and for funding of clubs and organisations. We appreciate that this needs to occur within legislative and policy constraints but encourage Council to work within a framework that ensures the decisions they make best reflect the wishes of the local community. We hope this

ensures that Council is empowered to act in a way that is mindful of, and responsive to, community concerns and social impacts.

In making our recommendations we note that they have been generated with the assistance of a range of information sources including:

- The Briefing Book prepared by Council as an initial stimulus;
- Responses to information requests we made at Jury meetings;
- Expert speakers as initially provided as well as those we further requested input from;
- Submissions from the public received through the process newDemocracy ran; and
- The Staff Jury Report.

We appreciate that this report cannot possibly reflect the full extent of discussions the Jury had. We have tried to ensure clarity in each of our recommendations but accept that there may be specific areas where our deliberations are not captured in detail. This should not detract from the recommendations we are making. We would like to suggest an ongoing role for those members of the Jury who are able, to act as a resource panel or sounding board for Council as they consider the potential application of what we have recommended. We would be pleased to provide ongoing representation and advice to Council and to continue discussions that might provide clarification or elaborate on the complexities of the report.

As an outcome, we hope this Jury process provides an opportunity for Council to adopt a change in their own culture that embraces possibility and diverse perspectives in relation to how they meet the needs of the community.

Employment, Economic and Business Development

We want Council's existing effort to continue but also note that Council should expand existing programs in these areas.

Eurobodalla's population is sparsely distributed across a large land mass. In order to have sustainable economic growth, we need more people, businesses and opportunity. The flow on effect being job creation. The Jury want people to remain, living and working in the Shire particularly young people.

Eurobodalla Shire needs a more agile and diverse economy to reduce dependence on tourism. If people are going to move and live here with their children there needs to be more investment in the knowledge economy. Knowledge is key, and is the future of economic growth. This would also include broadening opportunities for young people in areas such as Council and other traineeships and apprenticeships that can lead to ongoing employment. This needs to be supported by high speed, affordable broadband access.

Eurobodalla needs to broaden our industry appeal and attract additional investment in clean technologies which would include pursuing and developing eco-tourism opportunities as they are one of the major employment and economic drivers in this region. This would be in line with keeping the environment pristine and attracting money to the area.

Recommendations

1. Council should provide incentives for business to establish or relocate to Eurobodalla such as temporary rates relief or concession.
2. Council should continue to partner with Chambers of Commerce and support initiatives such as the collaboration of all Chambers on Shire wide initiatives.
3. Council to continue to advocate for ultra-fast broadband (one Gigabit per second or higher) across the whole Shire that meets the needs of the knowledge economy into the future.
4. Council should consider the needs of the community as a whole in making business and economic development decisions.
5. Council should investigate opportunities in clean technologies that could be on sold to other shires and communities.
6. Council should provide support and opportunities for creation of local jobs for local youth.
7. Council should develop and distribute a 'Red Tape Guide' in plain English to make negotiating Council regulation and setting up business easier. This could be electronic or paper format.
8. Provide continued support of the unique identity of each town within the Shire and encourage and incentivise the further development of the aged care, arts and music industries.
9. Council to identify partners to establish a 'start-up' hub similar to the Lighthouse Innovation Hub in Canberra.
10. Council should seek additional grant funding from other levels of government for economic development programs and infrastructure.

Aboriginal and Broader Community Involvement

Greater recognition and participation in decision making by all members of the community would lead to greater cohesiveness. The community is Council's priority and if people don't feel communicated with and acknowledged, issues as to how decisions are made and money is spent may arise.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 5% of the Eurobodalla community. The Aboriginal community can face significant barriers in accessing social, health and employment support. To create a harmonious and stable society all members need to have equal access. The Jury would also like to note that there is opportunity for Council to address issues of past neglect that have affected the Aboriginal community.

The Jury acknowledges Council's efforts in collaborating and supporting the community as a whole. However, we believe there needs to be increased communication, consultation and engagement with the whole community. This could be achieved by changing the methodology or model that Council is currently using. This will enable Council to clearly know what the community needs and wants.

Recommendations

1. Noting the recent Community Engagement Framework development undertaken and the pending consideration by Council, we encourage Council to improve communication, feedback and involvement with the wider community.
2. Council should improve external communication by all media, website, newspaper, radio, television, flyers, post-outs, newsletters, community meetings, online surveys and feedback forums and social media.
3. Council should increase community engagement including: quarterly resident meetings with Councillors and Council staff, regular neighbourhood/precinct meetings in all areas to determine capital works required and provide tours of Council facilities.
4. Council should continue providing and better promote the option of SMS reporting of infrastructure repairs (Snap, Send, Solve) needed in emergencies.
5. Council to continue to recognise the significant contribution that community organisations and volunteers provide in Eurobodalla and create a volunteer resource or referral centre, possibly in a library.
6. Council should continue efforts to source state and federal grants in partnership and consultation with the Aboriginal community.
7. Council should develop business cases and dedicate resources to working with the Aboriginal community to define specific local needs, for example develop cultural facilities that showcase Aboriginal heritage.
8. Council should be a leader in face-to-face reconciliation and recognition of the Aboriginal community.
9. Council should continue to fund Aboriginal staff training and staff cultural awareness training.
10. Council should refresh and strengthen (make more inclusive) the existing advisory body and undertake face to face consultation with Aboriginal members of the community.
11. Council should continue to provide designated Aboriginal traineeships and internships within Council.

12. Council must investigate current successful mentoring programs for youth to see if they may be applied in Eurobodalla.
13. Council should prioritise recommendations from the existing Aboriginal Advisory Committee.
14. Council should further promote existing Aboriginal tour guides and Aboriginal cultural tours.
15. Council should continue the establishment of Gateway signage to recognise the aboriginal community/lands and signage to identify local sights of significance.

Community Services

This key area includes ageing services, children's services, youth services, disability services and other community services. The jury felt this area is important as community services are about providing liveability and quality of life and also provide ongoing local employment. Our recommendations revolve around Council having a continued role in providing community services in specific ways and areas.

Recommendations

1. Council should continue to work with state and federal governments and other organisations to obtain ongoing grants to fund services, particularly in areas where existing grant funding is due to run out.
2. Council should review with an aim to continually improve the youth services that are currently provided with a view to providing activity-based youth services that potentially increase the skills of local youth. This may include knowledge sharing with other local councils.
3. Council should also investigate costs and opportunities to facilitate ease of transport for youth to attend activities. This could potentially involve partnerships with local clubs and businesses to provide vehicles and/or other financial support.
4. Council should continue their current high quality of work around encouraging volunteers to work with the aged, frail, and lonely.
5. In relation to the NDIS Council should continue to act as a potential provider of services.
6. Council should encourage the establishment of more retirement homes projects to generate additional rates and to support local residents.
7. Council to investigate the possibility of a group transport system funded by an annual membership fee for all particularly those that are unable to drive on specific occasions.

Environment and Rural Lands

Council has an important role of stewardship of our natural environment and therefore our community's quality of life. This example of stewardship needs to be embraced by all stakeholders in the community, in particular farmers, tourism operators, land owners, developers and also residents and visitors.

This includes (but may not be limited to) preservation and/or regeneration of natural landscapes and waterways, protection of native flora and fauna, sustainable use of rural lands, responsibility for future development considering urban sprawl, responsible use of Council land and renewable energy generation methods, for example solar and methane.

We also wish to emphasise the Jury's view that the natural environment is what underpins many of the key areas of recommendations included in this report and as such, its preservation and conservation must be prioritised over individual profit touted as "progress" in any decision making process. The quadruple bottom line (environment, social, economic and culture) is vitally important in this regard.

Council is to be congratulated on the success of its promotion of the Eurobodalla as "unspoilt". The Jury urges Council to demonstrate a genuine intent to keep this promotional image a reality by ensuring environmental concerns take precedence when implementing policies and projects across all areas of administration. For example, by not allowing the environment to bear the externalised costs of development or land use, Council will ensure our natural environment will continue to provide its benefits (such as clean water, air, fertile soil and biodiversity).

Finally, the Jury acknowledges that Council has existing duties and obligation under legislation relating to environmental challenges. We encourage them to consider taking a more proactive role, where they are not already doing so, to make our community resilient to future impacts such as climate change, sea level rise and resource scarcity.

Recommendations

1. We note Council has established the Rural Producers Advisory Committee following the adoption of the Rural Lands Strategy. The addition of a dedicated agriculture officer or function within Council will supercharge this growth area. Council should make a budget allocation for this in order to address specific local issues in addition to any resources provided by other tiers of government in the area. This could be funded initially by a small grant and/or by short-term budget sacrifices from other areas that have long benefited from Council support. Developing local agriculture provides infrastructure and services to other industries such as health, tourism, business development and employment, and should be a new focus of economic development and resilience-building for Council.
2. Council should support local agriculture that demonstrates sustainable practices. Rates and other charges could be incentive based, so users who manage their land (or water) sustainably receive concessions that recognise the cost savings in services they have provided to the environment and the greater community.
3. Council should continue and further develop its collaboration with Aboriginal people and use of traditional landcare techniques (for example possible reduction of bush fire risk without excessive land clearing).
4. Council should prioritise support for eco-tourism enterprises. Eurobodalla Tourism could introduce an environmental/sustainability rating or accreditation system on their website.

Services and advice could be provided to existing tourism operators to make their businesses more eco-focussed.

5. We support the consistent application of the LEP and other environmental strategies and plans such that green belts and riparian zones are protected. We encourage Council to resist pressure to compromise on environmental constraints placed on development approvals.
6. Within legislative constraints, Council should use what means it can, including fines and charges to discourage non-compliance or unsustainable practices.
7. Council should use what leverage it has to push for environmentally responsible logging practices and better use of the timber which is harvested within the Eurobodalla. Council should advocate for the minimum tonnage offered in the next Regional Forest Agreement process.
8. Council should ensure any funding allocated to flying fox management should be used in accordance with best practice expert advice. Management plans must demonstrate a realistic chance of delivering positive outcomes for both residents and wildlife.
9. Council should continue to explore investment in renewable energy generation and waste used as a resource and/or partnering with other innovators, with the intention of stimulating significant new local industry. We encourage Council to continue pursuing state and federal grant funds to achieve this.
10. Council should continue to save power with passive energy standards and move towards greater renewable energy production to use for its own operations. Council should also explore the possibility of contributing excess energy to the grid, if this would be a cost-effective means of generating revenue.
11. Council should continue to partner with local business chambers to promote the area as a community actively adopting sustainable land use, renewable energy and reclaiming waste as a resource. Other possible partners include the Southcoast Health and Sustainability Alliance, Local Land Services, Coastcare, other shire Councils leading innovation in waste management and renewable energy generation, farmers and Sustainable Agriculture & Gardening Eurobodalla.
12. Where significant community concern is demonstrated, Council should undertake a strong advocacy role in protecting our environment around issues outside of local authority, such as the threat to our waterways posed by mining upstream, potential contamination of land or water by industry in general, the presence of factory fishing trawlers, loss of marine sanctuaries within marine parks or alternative controls for introduced pest species.

Long Term Vision and Innovation

Through ensuring sustainability while recognising our dependence on the natural environment Council should prioritise the natural environment in all decisions. This includes population growth, minimising land degradation, employment, inclusive community and revenue raising. We encourage seizing opportunities, working smarter in partnership and inviting business innovation, incentives and opportunities. Council is encouraged to be a leader in promoting and using new or innovative technologies. They also should take a holistic innovative approach to the running of the Council and the services it provides and avoid compartmentalisation/silos within the organisation.

The Citizens' Jury feels to sustain Eurobodalla's future we need to keep up with the rest of the country and world, use best practices, maintain Eurobodalla's image and unique character, grow economic development, create revenue and tap into the richness of the community.

Council should lead by example - If they are innovative, it encourages the current community to do so and attracts outside innovative thinkers.

Recommendations

1. When reviewing their Community Strategic Plan Council should research and incorporate industry best practice.
2. Council should continue researching ways to become more sustainable and environmentally self-sufficient.
3. Council should provide incentives to increase the self-sustainability of buildings and houses i.e. passive energy ratings.
4. Council should adopt new strategies that have been proven successful such as are outlined in the ACELG document on Innovation.
5. Council to have an innovation week or expo, for example engage with the community for innovative ideas, talk to schools and students about what they see as innovation or have an innovation competition within high schools.
6. Council to should create a "think tank" for innovative ideas drawn from local residents eg retired researchers, academics, business people etc.
7. Council should continue partnering with local business and non-profits/community organisations to undertake research projects that explore alternative energy, enhanced telecommunications services and eco-tourism.
8. Council should investigate revenue opportunities through use of waste facilities to generate income and or energy source, eg incorporating methane collection; recycling of plastics into viable resource.
9. Council should consider training for staff to develop innovative thinking skills which may encourage smarter work operations.
10. Council should seek to access the knowledge and skills held within the local community to implement innovative approaches to local challenges.

Advocacy and Facilitation

The roles of advocacy and facilitation for Eurobodalla Shire are critical to the work of Council. This includes advocating for public transport, upgrades of major roads, economic development, job creation and essential infrastructure such as the NBN.

It also includes representation to higher levels of government on behalf of business, community groups for the purpose of securing greater funding and services and to improve economic viability of the shire.

This role is undertaken within the existing staff positions.

Advocacy and facilitation is important for boosting income to this shire, which struggles with low income from rates. We need to attract investment in industry additional to tourism, in order to diversify employment opportunities. Advocacy is necessary to obtain equity of services for our regional area, for example in health, education, public transport, aboriginal reconciliation and services for disadvantaged members of the community.

It is important for Council to continually secure grants as a source of income to build new business.

The Citizens' Jury acknowledges Council has been successful in securing grant funding for capital projects, but recognises there is difficulties in securing ongoing funding for the maintenance and upkeep of assets.

Recommendations

1. Council to link with existing systems to identify grants applicable to local residents, community groups, businesses etc. and communicate this on website or directly to individuals, community groups and local businesses.
2. Council should continue to support community organisations to make applications to secure grants.
3. Council should increase their advocacy for Eurobodalla as a venue for activities like conferences and conventions (knowledge industry/business).
4. Council should identify new markets for local industries including tourism to supplement existing markets.
5. Council should more closely work with the local community to generate and demonstrate support for the issues on which they are advocating.
6. Council should further explore partnering opportunities with Local MPs, neighbouring councils, ALGA, local business (including non-profits), local industry bodies, community organisations working to rebuild industry and local economy. For example Sustainable Agriculture & Gardening Eurobodalla.
7. Council should takes a greater role in the marketing the currently available public transport services.

Pathways

The Citizens' Jury has identified that there is a lack of pathways and cycle ways within the Shire and we believe that this is a big issue for many residents and tourists. Pathways are particularly important for the aged and frail as well as maintaining health, activity and safety amongst community members and it is a potential growth area to attract tourists. We note that Council has an existing Pathways Strategy which is under review.

Recommendations

1. Council should prioritise an increased allocation of funding to more quickly implement the new Pathways Strategy when finalised. If Council determines it is unable to fully fund this Strategy, Council should consider alternative methods of funding.
2. Council should not only fund pathways that are links between shops and schools but also fund pathways that connect around the coastline to attract and improve the tourist experience.
3. Council should pursue opportunities in partnering with the individual communities, and how they can partner in fundraising and building and planning the paths, eg Dalmeny Deviates.
4. Council should seek funding a variety of sources from State and Federal Government and other partners eg institutions, residents, business, Department of Health, universities, philanthropists.

Roads, Rates and Rubbish

The Citizens' Jury believe the current level of service for roads, repairs and road rejuvenation is inadequate. For example, we believe repairs to roads should prioritise long-term solutions rather than short-term temporary fixes.

The Council's waste management services are considered excellent and we commend their continuing efforts to make improvements particularly through the use of glass crushing for road construction and polystyrene melting.

Recommendations

1. Council should invest more time lobbying State and Federal Government to meet the Council's and public's idea of how roads should be maintained and replaced.
2. Council should lobby the State and Federal Governments to improve the access in and out of the Shire. It is socially and economically vital to have safe access in and out of the Eurobodalla Shire.
3. Council should continue to lobbying State and Federal Governments for grants.
4. Council should more effectively plan to make road construction a single undertaking to provide significant efficiency savings. Footpaths, gutters, and roads should be rolled out in unison as a single project. Council should also incorporate water sensitive urban design.
5. Council should look into new innovative road surfacing methods
6. Council should utilise local or community involvement **before** planning changes.
7. Council should continue to improve and expand environmental enhancements to waste management services and facilities and use innovative technologies.
8. Council should maintain and improve rubbish and recycling including reclamation from hard rubbish as they are a necessary service to support the community. Council should continue researching other councils' approaches to roads and waste management.
9. Council should investigate additional means of collecting residential large green waste that does not fit in existing bins.
10. Council should develop a policy that provides temporary fee respite for residents after storms so that residential green waste will be taken to the tip and not illegally dumped.
11. Council should investigate opportunities to share resources (eg plant equipment) with other nearby/adjacent councils if it provide cost or efficiency advantages.
12. Council should investigate opportunities to improve and expand the Recycling Shop through partnering with local organisations such as the Mens' Shed and others; through operating along more commercial lines; and through expansion of items reclaimed.
13. Council should continue the upgrading of existing bus terminals to ensure they are identifiable, accessible and safe.

Arts Development

Arts improve and inform the whole of society. The nurturing and support of all the arts including Aboriginal arts is important for health and wellbeing in any community. The development of the Arts provides a platform for the inclusion of all members of our society, encourages learning in the young, is important for mental health and provides the potential to create income for individuals and community. The art produced in our Shire is one of the things that makes us unique. It is a potential tourism drawcard.

Council's support in enabling the enjoyment and promotion of the arts should continue and spending in this area should not be reduced.

Recommendations

1. Council should maintain the current arts services and spaces it provides and investigate opportunities to expand such as: jam sessions and "muso nights", outdoor performance spaces.
2. Council should improve communication about arts programs and exhibitions such as featured artists at libraries and information sessions.
3. Council should investigate the ways in which it can work with authorities, local businesses and the community to ensure the vitality of the live performance industry can be restored. This should include ensuring its own regulations do not unduly impact on local artists and businesses with a view to ensuring that the closure of venues is minimised
4. Council should review the potential of its current facilities for use by the arts with a view to making them more accessible and useable. This could include working with local schools to offer spaces for students to perform and display, or potentially using school halls as community arts spaces.
5. Council should ensure that the potential for a performing arts base is considered in the redevelopment of the MacKay Park precinct.
6. Council should investigate the development of a mobile library service in partnership with/funded by local business.
7. Council should be encouraged to more closely engage with arts groups and explore potential for further engagement with regional and national arts, for example a Riverside Arts Pavilion.
8. Council should continue to apply for funding from state and federal governments, as well as funding from other sources to supplement existing and developing arts programs.