

## 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 **27 October 2020**

Name	Subject/Comments
<b>Public Forum – 9.30am</b>	
Henk Roubos on behalf of Sue Mackenzie	QON20/007 Batemans Bay Community Centre Lease
Coral Anderson	QON20/007 Batemans Bay Community Centre Lease
<b>Not presenting</b>	
Allan Russell	QON20/007 Batemans Bay Community Centre Lease

Council version

## Speech to Council -BBCC potential lease Speech to Council

27Oct2020

Mayor, Councillors

We speak to agenda item 6 ( QON20/007)

### **Re: Batemans Bay Community Centre- (Expressions of Interest in a Lease)**

Today Council meets to discuss a proposed leasing of the Batemans Bay Community Centre (referred to as the BB CC in the following).

On behalf of Perfex, the 1,000plus 2019 Petitioners, and other concerned citizens, I speak here to **oppose** any consideration of removing the Batemans Bay Community Centre from Community/Council hands. Let me explain why.

First, from the NSW Local Govt site:

( <https://lg.nsw.gov.au/Public/Policy/Social-and-Community.aspx> )

*'As the sphere of government closest to the people they represent, councils work hard to **create social cohesion and a sense of belonging for all members of the community....'***

*In light of this we would like to ask you:*

*How does dispersing 120 odd community groups away from a centre bought and built with community effort, skills and good will, aid 'social cohesion'?*

*That move would seriously fracture community cohesion. It would disperse users who have long maintained a central identity by using the Community Centre and hosting significant activities in it.*

What if Council offices were in 7 sites? Would you see that as preferable to one site the Community could identify as 'central'? It is, in this case, after all, a Community **Centre**.

The potential loss of the Centre from Community hands first captured the concern of users. Now the wider community are coming to know what they will lose, and what it will cost them, and they are not happy.

We are here today to confirm that concern, to note it growing even stronger and to address those concerns with you once again.

More than a year ago, in early 2019, a petition was delivered to Council, signed by over 1,000 BBay residents. It requested Council to keep and maintain the CCentre in Council hands, for affordable, relevant and accessible Community use, as it is now.

Submissions to retain the Centre, its facilities and its services have also come from Not for Profit and social health groups such as Meals on Wheels, U3A, Probus, Impact Eurobodalla

and individuals, as well as from us, Perfex. Letters of concern have come from Fiona Philips MP to both the Mayor and GM.

A banner has been commissioned to highlight the issue and is presently being displayed around town, held by concerned group representatives and individuals.

The recent Oct2nd rally at the Centre was well attended despite Covid, with speakers from major community groups. **Regrettably, only two Councillors attended: Councillors Mayne and McGinlay. We commend them for their willingness to hear the views of the community they represent, and attend.**

### **Amenity**

Over 120 groups used the Centre last year.

It has only been by Council management and the affability and helpfulness of the staff there that made this possible.

We are glad to have the discussion re alternative venues because it is clear that nowhere else are there Council amenities that offer what the BB CC provides: a **centrally located combination** of amenities **grouped in a way nowhere else in the town:**

- a good-sized kitchen,
- freezer space,
- sprung floor (unique to local Council venues),
- level and ready access,
- affordability,
- easy parking
- close proximity to **services (Service NSW, Centrelink, Aboriginal Housing, AdultEd, etc)** and the CBD
- and, importantly clean and safe and accessible public toilets – there being none others at this end of town.

We note too, that any previous alternative arrangements referred to have been for short-term events such as the bushfire emergency and elections, not for sustained periods, so are a poor comparison.

*Despite Council claims, nowhere else is as **comparable in amenity as the Centre.***

It is not just the cost factor that concerns us. If the BBCC is leased and local volunteer groups need to move elsewhere, **their administration time and processes will increase markedly** in their need to negotiate or book with more venue sites- at least seven according to Council's proposed alternative venues list, one being a non-Council body. (We note you have not included MPark, which is just as well as, despite original plans for it to duplicate the BBCC, that has clearly not eventuated, with it now only supplying one small room and a kitchenette).

As we see it, the Community Centre's role should be as an adjunct to any assets the MPark project purports to add to the general community, not a casualty of it.

This is madness **We need this place**: for the nuts and bolts of community life, for our social well-being.

And consider this: what if we are proved right and in five years' time a new Community Centre is needed to cater for the increased population and its wider needs?

Where will it be sited?

Who will pay for it?

Do you expect **the energy and drive, the costs, goodwill and skills that built this one** to come from the Community you take this one from? **That is very unlikely.**

### Demographics

In this shire we have a disproportionately high demographic of over 60s (some 41% per the 2016 census) , and particularly in the Bay. Many community volunteers and much secure income for the Shire comes from this sector.

**Without the active and willing involvement of that older demographic to support their peers and the wider community, Council services would need to be increased - for instance in mental, youth, social health and transport services – with an increase for ratepayers, from our calculations, well beyond any benefits of taking the Community Centre out of community hands.** *(Henk, you may want to mention here that you are one of those transport volunteers)*

\*While the 2019 Population Projections by Planning NSW indicate that

- the overall population of Eurobodalla is estimated to **decrease** in the next 25 years.... ,
- The number of **people aged 65 and over** is estimated to **increase** over that same time period

Coupled with that, Batemans Bay has an **unemployment rate of 9.9%**, with 35.9% of workers working on a part time basis who also need social inclusion services.

So, it is clear venues and facilities for an increasing older demographic and the under-employed will continue to be needed and, inevitably, **increased** to provide

- meaningful activities,
- social involvement and support,
- community cohesion and if we are to
- maintain a social environment that will attract visitors, investors and residents.

As Elton John said: **\*\*“what do we have to do to make you change your mind”** and so get back on the path towards the community trusting this Council once more, and truly believing you have our best interests at heart.

*We are NOT the enemy, but your own constituents whom you are elected to represent.*

We therefore strongly request that the BBay ComCentre remain in Council hands to maintain it as an ongoing affordable, accessible and useful community asset, to meet the present and future needs of an increasingly aged demographic, **to, overturn the 'Operational' status of the Centre and return the Centre to 'Community land' status.**

Yours sincerely

Dr Susan Mackenzie (President PERFEX)

\*<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Factsheets-and-faqs/Research-and-demography/Population-projections/2019-Eurobodalla.pdf>

\*\*("Sorry seems to be the Hardest word" – Bernie Taupin/Elton John

What have I got to do to make you love me  
What have I got to do to make you care  
What do I do when lightning strikes me  
And I wake to find that you're not there?

What have I got to do to make you want me  
What have I got to do to be heard  
What do I say when it's all over?  
And sorry seems to be the hardest word

It's sad, so sad (so sad)  
It's a sad, sad situation  
And it's getting more and more absurd  
It's sad, so sad (so sad)  
Why can't we talk it over?  
Oh it seems to me  
That sorry seems to be the hardest word

(Repeat above verse)

What have I do to make you love me, oh  
What have I got to do to be heard  
What do I do when lightning strikes me  
What have I got to do?  
What have I got to do?  
When sorry seems to be the hardest word

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Bernie Taupin / Elton John

Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, BMG Rights Management, Songtrust Ave <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvbQzRAi4wM>

Morning Councillors (or should I say Council because that's what you are, you are the Council, 'a body of people elected by the people to manage the affairs of a city, county, or other municipal district for and on behalf of the people'. The 'Council' is not a body of public servants.

*Section 233 of the Local Government Act 1993 reads:*

#### *Oath and affirmation for councillors*

A councillor must take an oath of office or make an affirmation of office at or before the first meeting of the council after the councillor is elected.

The oath or affirmation may be taken or made before the general manager of the council, an Australian legal practitioner or a justice of the peace and is to be in the following form—

Oath I swear/affirm that I will undertake the duties of the office of councillor in the best interests of the people of Eurobodalla Shire and the Eurobodalla Shire Council and that I will faithfully and impartially carry out the functions, powers, authorities and discretions vested in me under the Local Government Act 1993 or any other Act to the best of my ability and judgment.

Do you remember taking that Oath/Affirmation four years ago? Will you uphold that Oath/Affirmation on behalf of the people who elected you to represent them and to act in their best interests?

#### **Questions**

- Why have Staff at Council's Facility Booking Office previously liaised with Batemans Bay Community Centre users to clarify their specific needs and find suitable alternative venues when Council claims it has made no decision regarding the future of the Centre? There is obviously a decision in 'principle' to consider the idea of disposing of the facility.
- Why were not these solicitous enquirers simply told that the Community Centre was not for lease? After all it is a Community Centre, owned by the community and used for community purposes on land owned by the community with the building paid for by the community.
- Will you advise the names of those 'unsolicited requesters'?
- Are the 'unsolicited requesters' aware of the strong community resistance to the leasing of the centre? Already one potential lessee has pulled out when made aware of the ongoing community concerns and opposition to the proposed move.
- *Why was its disposal **ever on the table** when we were assured by the general manager that the Batemans Bay Aquatic, Arts & Leisure Centre project would be built within our Shire budget?*

The Batemans Bay Aquatic, Arts & Leisure Centre project will add another layer of activity for the community, but it in no way meets the present, let alone the projected needs of our many community groups for meetings and activities. To compare: currently available at the BB Community Centre (excluding toilet facilities) is 397sm of space for various activities, all at ground floor level access in the centre of town with no highway to cross. In the planned BB Regional Aquatic, Arts & Leisure Centre, on the other side of the highway, there is 183sm of space allocated for 3 meeting rooms, two designated as Art workshops. There is also no provision for a commercial kitchen, only a kitchenette with an urn, and no sprung floor in sight.

Why should we have to lose any key community assets to prop up operational costs of the new leisure centre, especially the present Community Centre, which was built by community fundraising and efforts.

Eurobodalla Council is colloquially and embarrassingly known as 'Eur-rob-a-dollar' locally because of its perceived over emphasis on money as first value, rather than community value, and the enormous debt we are currently headed for as a result of the Batemans Bay Regional Aquatic, Arts & Leisure Centre project, initially and ongoing. Such reference hardly instils faith in investors.

You say user groups can go elsewhere, but to do so would be to disperse community focus and hundreds of community activities rather than make them more cohesive.

I support **Impact Eurobodalla and several other** in their submissions and particular concerns in this regard.

Finally, a brief history of the Batemans Bay Community Centre as told to me by a long time local .....

The original Batemans Bay Community Centre was built by the community on land donated to it where the old Westpac building sits in Orient Street. Somehow, it then came under the 'care and control' of Eurobodalla Shire Council.

'Council' at some later stage decided to sell the Community Centre against the wishes of the community. I believe a sum of \$600,000 from the proceeds of that sale were used to build a new community centre on reclaimed land in Museum Place opposite the Museum which has just recently signed a further 20 year lease. Lot 101 in Deposited Plan 1001026, which includes the watergardens and museum, is currently classified 'operational'. However, this land could simply be reclassified as 'community use'. To get the ball rolling, and according to the Office of Local Government, the first step is for our Council (Councillors) to simply pass a resolution today to that effect.

Over to you councillors.



Mayor and Councillors  
General Manager  
Eurobodalla Shire Council  
Moruya  
NSW 2537

Dear Mayor, Councillors, and General Manager

**Re Batemans Bay Community Centre -Leasing proposal**

Unfortunately, due to work and time availability, I am unable to offer to present to you on Tuesday when Council meets. I am therefore taking the opportunity to write to you again.

I thank you for receiving my earlier letters and emails on this topic and I am sure that you will be considering carefully all points of view as you work towards a decision on the leasing proposal for the Batemans Bay Community Centre.

While I do not wish to cover old ground, I would like to highlight some points which I believe note where I am coming from on a personal basis, as the Manager of an organisation with an interest in the Centre and as a former Principal which used your community facilities.

- I believe that the MacKay Park complex is going to be a great asset to the Batemans Bay community and congratulate Council on this bold move.

However, there are two 'downsides' which at present concern me being

- That the projected costs for hiring the facility will impact upon the small community groups who may wish to use the complex, so an alternative is required which has ease of access for all.
  - The wonderful performances which we are going to get could see the rooms set aside for the community being needed for the Shows, exhibitions etc. Therefore, the community groups will be asked to book elsewhere so why not maintain the present facility which they can use regularly. Although in saying this our regular Thursday booking has been cancelled due to someone else wanting the facility daily I believe, so already we are searching for another location, and it is not easy even within your present offering.
- I look at our Shire and believe it is a wonderful place in which to live and that 'lifestyle' is a concept which Council sells as an asset of the region. 'Life style' means that things which are of benefit to the community can happen, do happen and provide a positive outcome for many.

The Shire Council has also been encouraging this concept by offering Not for Profit groups, and the general public, affordable rates when using the Batemans Bay Community Centre. This must continue and your philanthropy has allowed many groups to establish, remain viable, and add value to our community. These contribute to what the Shire can offer to people moving into the area and to visitors who maybe here for a short period.

- I once spoke to the General Manager at a MacKay Park Sunset Committee meeting about how the community viewed the Council. The General Manager told me that Council received regular feedback online about its performance and how it was perceived by the Community. The General Manager went on to tell me that the Council was viewed favourably and that she was satisfied by the positive nature of these responses.

At the time I did say that this was not the feeling in the general community, and that most members of the public do not respond nor let Council know what they think.

I am sure that as elected representatives you hear from a range of people and I am sure that most of them are polite and encouraging. But the reality is that many of your decisions are not finding favour and the proposed leasing out of the Batemans Bay Community Centre at commercial rates is certainly one of these.

If I could arrange a meeting of people at the Centre earlier in the month in just three days and get 122+ people sign in and show dissatisfaction, then there is reason for you to listen. I also had people tell me that due to work they could not attend but supported the Centre remaining as a community asset. Otherwise our numbers would have been much higher.

To me, this, and comments and laughter when the name of Eurobodalla Shire Council is mentioned, make me wonder if people are frustrated at some decisions and actions. Please let this be one decision where they applaud your 'listening ear' and that you will seek some other way to make your Budget balance.

- The Eurobodalla Shire has a large proportion of its population fall into the retired category. Also it is well known for the number of low socio-economic income earners and the many people who rely upon welfare assistance.

It is easy to think that we are a wealthy community because there are many 'out of towners' who own a holiday home here, but the reality is different. Our citizens can not afford huge prices for events -they can not afford 'Canberra prices' to come to our Group Social Support activities so we at Eurobodalla Meals on Wheels have to operate on a lower cost structure.

Therefore, we greatly appreciate your assistance with the low rent for our community facilities. Please let this continue to be the case and do what Councils are supposed to do, that is support its people to enjoy a great lifestyle.

- At a previous Council meeting I spoke and congratulated you on the appearance of the Shire and on what you are providing. I stick with these comments for there is so much good being done, that it is sad to hear people scoff and laugh when the Council is mentioned.

With the new Batemans Bay foreshore plans, with the MacKay Park complex, with the upgrades to sewerage and parks, with the new Arts Complex in Moruya and soon to be in Narooma there are certainly good things being provided to assist groups and to improve our lifestyle. But the community must be listened to and their wishes honoured.

I ask that you continue to manage, and promote the Batemans Bay Community Centre as one of your prized assets that tells the community you care and wish to continue encouraging them to get out and do things for themselves, and that you will provide the infrastructure rather than the service.

I was delighted to be heard when the MacKay Park Sunset Committee met and for my comments to be welcomed and valued, and even to see some of them come through in some form such as the ability to expand the facility in the future if there was a need.

I hope that some of my comments will encourage you to be bold, to keep in Councils hands a much valued and well used facility and to continue with your philanthropic support of our community groups.

  
Alan Russell JP

23 October 2020