

ORDINARY COUNCIL
MAYORAL MINUTES
Thursday 19 May 2022

Ordinary Council Meeting

Thursday, 19 May 2022

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PORT MACQUARIE HASTINGS COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie) (17:39): I extend my congratulations and commendations to the community of Port Macquarie Hastings on its robust and extensive engagement during the development of its community strategic plan [CSP], *Imagine 2050*. I also commend the staff involved in the development of *Imagine 2050* for providing a range of opportunities for the community to participate. In the end, nearly 1,800 people provided input over 15 months to help shape the draft plan, reflecting the community's vision, objectives, and strategies for the future and how we will work together to achieve those goals over the next 30 years. The document is a statutory requirement for New South Wales councils and is a part of a suite of documents that are required to be endorsed by council by the 30 June following a council election. The community engagement document notes that the CSP is "a culmination of extensive community input", "defines our community's vision" and "is one of the most important planning documents for the Port Macquarie-Hastings region."

I also note that the same document states on page 11 that:

Priority areas that the community would like to see Council take action within the next four years is more shared paths for walking and cycling, improve our road networks and traffic congestion, improve major infrastructure, address climate change and disaster mitigation, and protect the natural environment.

It should be no surprise then that these priority areas were reflected in the final CSP that was presented to councillors for endorsement at their most recent meeting. Page 11 of *Imagine 2050* noted that one of the community concerns was the impacts of climate change. On page 22 it further noted that the community said that it wanted to reduce its carbon emissions and respond to climate change.

Page 29 notes that, in order to be effective, the community must continually consider the question of how it best empowers its residents to prepare for natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. It is somewhat disappointing, therefore, that the views of the community following extensive consultation were ignored when the councillors resolved at their meeting on 28 April this year to adopt the CSP. The motion was resolved in the affirmative, but it included a request to the CEO to remove any references to climate change from the CSP.

In many ways, the community should not be surprised as the council has already resolved to rescind its climate emergency declaration and has flagged its intention to rescind its Climate Change Response Policy. This contradicts many other existing council policies and statements, including the key community theme of achieving a connected, sustainable and accessible community and environment through minimising the impact of natural events and climate change. I make it clear that I absolutely accept the differing views of those who reside in the Port Macquarie electorate, whether it be in relation to local roads, sporting fields, health services or climate change. What I will not accept is the blatant misrepresentation of others, including the New South Wales Government, by councillors during debate on this issue. During debate in the 28 April council meeting Mayor Peta Pinson stated in reference to climate change:

We should be a leader but we know that at local government level, we are unable to lead this from the bottom especially when we know the two tiers of government above us have not scripted what climate change action looks like.

The New South Wales Government's *Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030* is the foundation of New South Wales' action on climate change. Its goal to reach net zero emissions by 2050 clearly demonstrates that it is taking decisive and responsible action on climate change. In fact, it is leading the nation. Its plan outlines how we will reduce emissions by growing the economy, creating jobs and reducing household costs over the next decade. Furthermore, the Australian Government has developed a National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy, positioning Australia to better anticipate, manage and adapt to our changing climate. The words of Local Government NSW, which can be found on its website under the heading "Climate Change", are:

With increased incidents of heat waves, droughts, bushfires, rising sea levels, changing rainfall patterns, and more frequent and intense weather events, Australia's climate is changing.

Along with state and federal governments, local government has a responsibility to adopt policies and practices that prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change ... and minimise the risks to the community through limiting carbon emissions ...

Climate change has the potential to damage council assets, cause serious disruptions to the delivery of council services, generate unbudgeted financial impacts, and affect the overall wellbeing of the community – particularly those most vulnerable to weather extremes.

In the almost 12 years that I have represented the people of my electorate I can certainly attest to the changing and increasing relevance of this issue to the community. In fact, this was vindicated in a recent *Port Macquarie News* survey, in which climate change was ranked as the number one issue in both the Cowper and the Lyne electorates. The community are well past debating whether climate change exists. They are well past debating who is responsible. I suggest that what they are seeking is leadership as provided by both the Commonwealth and State governments and by Local Government NSW so that we can achieve "a connected, sustainable, accessible community and environment that is protected now and into the future", as highlighted by the council in its own documentation.

Mr JAMES GRIFFIN (Manly—Minister for Environment and Heritage) (17:44): In my capacity as Minister for the environment, I echo the words and the concern raised by the member for Port Macquarie with respect to the Port Macquarie Hastings Community Strategic Plan, which by all accounts seems to be a well considered and thought-out plan, aside from the shocking omission of anything dealing with climate change. New South Wales is leading the country with respect to our net zero plan and the strategies and work we are doing within the environment space. So I echo her concerns with this change to the community strategic plan being put forward by Port Macquarie Hastings Council. It is a terrible omission. The reality is, as she said, the community is looking for leadership, not people shirking their responsibilities when it comes to issues as important as climate change and our environment more broadly. I commend the private member's statement.