

ORDINARY COUNCIL

LATE REPORTS

Thursday 18 April 2024

Ordinary Council Meeting

Thursday, 18 April 2024

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11 April 2024

The Hon Jenny Aitchison MP
Minister for Regional Transport and Roads
52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Via web form

Dear Minister Aitchison,

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council - Settlement Point and Hibbard Ferry Services

I am writing to you regarding the operation of the two vehicular ferries over the Hastings River at Port Macquarie. This letter follows my recent correspondence dated 10 April 2024 to you on this matter.

I have learned that the Lower Portland Ferry, referred to in my letter of 10 April 2024 which referenced NSW Government financial support for this ferry's operation, will have management of the service taken over by the NSW Government. From what I have seen reported, it appears the NSW Government have stepped in to address what has been a mismanaged service by the Hawkesbury City and Hills Shire Councils. This ferry connects a local road with the regional road network, as does the Hibbard Ferry service in the Port Macquarie-Hastings. I also note that the Hastings River ferries fulfill a very similar purpose to this ferry, being an essential link for commuters, tourist and emergency services. Despite being of longer travel time, alternative routes also exist to that provided by the Lower Portland Ferry.

I find this decision of the NSW Government hard to fathom in light of your correspondence of 29 February 2024. Our community are confused by this decision and once again this further highlights the inconsistency in the provision of ferry services across NSW. Our community in the Port Macquarie-Hastings are greatly disadvantaged by the current status of ferry operations across NSW and hearing advice of this decision is of great disappointment to our Council and community in light of our discussions with you at meetings during the course of 2023.

I eagerly await your response to this letter and our recent correspondence of 10 April 2024. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely



Dr Clare Allen
Chief Executive Officer

CC: The Hon. Leslie Williams MP, Member for Port Macquarie
Anna Zycki, Regional Director North, Transport for NSW

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10 April 2024

The Hon Jenny Aitchison MP
Minister for Regional Transport and Roads
52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

Via web form

Dear Minister Aitchison,

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council - Settlement Point and Hibbard Ferry Services

I am writing in response to your reply regarding the operation of the two vehicular ferries over the Hastings River at Port Macquarie dated 29 February 2024, and your most recent response dated 9 April 2024.

I thank you for your response as Council has been seeking advice from the NSW Government and Transport for NSW for over 12 months with respect to the matter.

We appreciate your engagement on this matter in our meetings during 2023, however the outcome advised within your letters is disappointing for Council and of great frustration. Council considered your first response at its Ordinary Meeting of 21 March 2024. At this meeting Council resolved the following:

That Council:

- 1. Note the response received from The Hon Jenny Aitchison MP, Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, regarding the operation of the two vehicular ferries over the Hastings River and Council's request for the NSW Government to take over the operation of the service or provide funding support.**
- 2. Note that this decision of the NSW Government will result in Port Macquarie-Hastings Council continuing to fund ferry services across the Hastings River, whilst most other vehicular ferry services in NSW are provided by the NSW Government or receive funding support.**
- 3. Continue advocacy for NSW Government funding for the ferry services that connects public roads.**

I am writing to you as an outcome of this resolution of Council and to seek your commitment to support our community.

As you are aware Council operates the vehicular ferry services on the Hastings River at significant cost to users and our local community. Without NSW Government support the cost impact on users and the local community will increase as it will be essential for Council to continue to raise charges, or consider service level reductions, and fund major investment in ferry infrastructure in need of renewal. Alternative routes to using the ferries for the North Shore community to access Port Macquarie are of significant length, time and cost, so are not a practical option unless in the event of an emergency.

Council within its correspondence over the course of 2023 articulated inconsistencies in how vehicular ferry services are provided across NSW. This is of great disadvantage to users of our

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ferry service and our broader community who pay rates. Most other ferry services across NSW are operated by Transport for NSW, have no charge to users and are funded by taxpayers across NSW. I would also note that some of those ferry services operated by the NSW Government are in areas of high socio-economic level, and are therefore more advantaged communities. Accordingly, there is clear inequity in the provision of vehicular ferry services across NSW and your response made no reference to, rationale for, or response to this situation.

Whilst I acknowledge your responses advise the NSW Government is not currently able to take on the management of the Hastings River ferry services, you did not advise on Council's request for financial support for the ferry operations on the Hastings River, like that provided by the NSW Government for the operation of the Lower Portland Ferry on the Hawkesbury River. Council seeks your advice with regard to our request for ongoing financial support for the ferry operations as an alternative to taking on management of the service.

Our local community on the North Shore of Port Macquarie is suffering the greatest impact of supporting the service cost. This is resulting in increased social isolation of that community and greater cost to access key services fundamental to daily life. Our local North Side Progress Association President, Kerry Fox, advised of the following information urging to seek your urgent intervention:

'The North Shore community is continuing to thrive with more and more young people and families moving to the community. We are being disadvantaged by the additional ferry fees charged to use our "road", on top of the annual council rates we already pay and constantly feel we are being held to ransom with the continual ferry fee increases.

The ferries are a logical extension of the Port Macquarie-Hastings road network and to single out a specific group of users for additional charges for the use of the 'road network' is unfair and discriminatory.

Operating the ferries is a great impost on Council finances and each year it is a constant battle between the north shore residents and council on the increasing ferry operations costs being passed onto our community by way of ferry fare increases to use our "road".

Maria River Road is expected to be tarred by the end of 2025 and this will definitely increase the ferry traffic. Whilst there have been many calls over the years to build a bridge, which has been deemed financially unviable and due to floods and shifting sand banks, the ferries are definitely a cheaper alternative.

The North Side Progress Associations stands together with the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council in their mission to seek NSW Government intervention and financial support is necessary to offset the increasing ferry operating costs of this critical service and the burden the service cost provides on our broader community.'

Once again I thank you for your engagement on this matter and I look forward to your consideration and timely response with respect to Council's request.

