

# **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.



If there are any additional details or information that you require, please contact PMHC's Director Community Infrastructure, Robert Fish, on 0484 192 200 or via email: [Robert.Fish@pmhc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Robert.Fish@pmhc.nsw.gov.au).

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. M. Allen".

**Dr Clare Allen**  
Chief Executive Officer

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

**The Hon Jenny Aitchison MP**  
Minister for Regional Transport and Roads



Ref: 01918590

**Dr Clare Allen**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Port Macquarie-Hastings Council**  
**PO Box 84**  
**Port Macquarie NSW 2444**

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Dear Dr Allen,

Thank you for your correspondence about the Lorne Road classification, and Settlement Point and Hibbard ferry services. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I acknowledge Council's reasons for writing and its requests for updates on funding commitments by the NSW Government.

I very much enjoyed my visit to the region in June last year, and was pleased to speak with key stakeholders and the community, which provided invaluable insight.

On 16 December 2022, Lorne Road, between Kendall and Comboyne, was classified as a Secondary Road (SR2125) under the Regional Roads category, in accordance with the *Roads Act 1993*. As such, the road is eligible to receive funding under the Block Grant and REPAIR programs. Transport for NSW advises it will send a letter to Council to confirm this arrangement.

Transport for NSW advises 2023-24 Block Grant funding of \$1,677,000 has been allocated to Port Macquarie-Hastings Council. Transport for NSW provided an additional \$219,430 in 2023-24 for the inclusion of Lorne Road, bringing Council's 2023-24 Block Grant funding to \$1,896,430.

As you are aware, Hastings River ferries are owned and administered directly by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council. As such, the operation and maintenance of the Settlement Point Ferry is Council's responsibility. While I note Council's support for a change in ownership, Transport for NSW has no plans to take over the operation of the ferries.

The alternative to travelling via the ferry involves using the M1 Pacific Motorway and Maria River Road, which is currently a dirt road. The Maria River Road upgrade project is being jointly delivered by Port Macquarie-Hastings and Kempsey Shire councils. The upgrade involves sealing Maria River Road to improve road safety and access, and changes to the speed limit and installation of signage and guardrails.

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Transport for NSW advises me construction is expected to start on 1 August 2024 with completion by 1 August 2025.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me. I genuinely appreciate the effort you have made to raise this matter with the NSW Government.

Yours sincerely,



09/04/2024

**The Hon Jenny Aitchison MP**  
**Minister for Regional Transport and Roads**



OFFICIAL

The Hon Jenny Aitchison MP  
Minister for Regional Transport and Roads



Ref: BN24/00011  
29 February 2024

Dr Claire Allen  
Chief Executive Officer  
Port Macquarie Hastings Council  
PO Box 84  
PORT MACQUARIE NSW 2444

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Re: Operation and maintenance of the Hibbard and Settlement Point ferries

Dear Dr Allen, 

I refer to your letter to Transport for NSW about the operation of the two vehicular ferries over the Hastings River at Port Macquarie and your request for the NSW Government to take over the operation of the service.

I understand the Hibbard and Settlement Point ferries have always been provided, operated and maintained by Port Macquarie Hastings Council. The ferry service provides Port Macquarie's north shore residents with access to Port Macquarie and gives the local community and tourists access to the National Park and beaches to the north.

I have considered your request carefully and given the current financial position of the Government and financial commitments to be fulfilled we are not in a position to take on the operation and maintenance of the Port Macquarie ferry services.

If you require any further information, please contact Ms Anna Zycki, Regional Director North, Community and Place, Regional and Outer Metropolitan, Transport for NSW, on 0477 755 905.

Sincerely,



Jenny Aitchison MP  
Minister for Regional Transport and Roads

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