

Yamba 16th NSW Coastal Conference – Mayor welcome speech.

I acknowledge Mayors, Councillors, special guests, and conference delegates.

Thank you Auntie Lillian Williams for your usual, very warm welcome to country. We acknowledge the Yaegl people as the traditional custodians of these lands and pay respects their elders past and present.

I warmly welcome all Coastal Conference delegates to Yamba by the sea and to our beautiful Clarence Valley.

I wish that your stay will be really enjoyable, that you will savour the unique hospitality of Yamba, and that the conference will prove stimulating, productive and memorable.

Clarence Valley Council area includes the Clarence, the largest river and floodplain in eastern Australia, and also over 70km of Pacific coastline.

Council is a product of a forced 2004 amalgamation of six former councils, has over 50000 constituents, comprises Grafton City and 42 other towns and villages, has a land area of ten and a half thousand square km and, with over 600 employees Council is the largest employer in the Clarence region.

We are proud that late last month Council was highly commended in the prestigious NSW AR Bluett Memorial Award.

Just a year ago Clarence Valley Council secured 2 of 17 open category National Awards for Local Government, for the \$180 million Regional Water Supply scheme and our state of the art Information Technology system. Several other state awards have also come Council's way in recent times.

Clarence Valley is very much on the move. The first elected council in less than three years has achieved many milestones. Our auditor reported last month that the council at 30th June 2007, was in a very sound financial position.

From a new beginning, Clarence Valley Council has sound strategic achievements, with a sustainability framework ensuring the thread of sustainability through all of council decision making, a raft of other economic, social and cultural plans and various strategies. We are

determined and focused, that Council will be a leader in local government across our nation.

I want today to focus on climate change which is justifiably a central issue for this conference.

For me, climate change is not so much an environmental issue as it is about the way we do business; the way we live our daily lives.

I hold the view that the planet's ability to absorb the impact of humans is at its limits.

I believe that easily the highest priority for our nation at this Federal election should be the survival and sustainability of our society and the planet. Climate change is indeed the great challenge of our time.

The science is in. The need to act is overwhelmingly supported by indisputable fact.

We know the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects higher fire risk, sea level rise, ocean acidification and drier El Nino events. It also says that whereas the peaking years for CO2 emissions is 2000-2015, we are already almost at 450 parts per million. Thus we are there now.

This means there is now a 95% chance that we will have global temperature increases of up to 3 degrees. I repeat we are there. It is crunch time. There can be no time to spare.

We face a global population of almost 9 billion by 2050. Water, climate change and peaking of global oil supply are surely immediate sustainability priorities. Drought, rapid Arctic ice melt and increasingly extreme weather events, all underline forcefully that continuing climate change denial is verging on the criminal.

It is blindingly obvious that we u continue conventional economic growth and rampant consumerism without destroying the planet. We need leaders of the highest order to think in the long term, to face up to the stark challenges of the global emergency, to build a consensus for change, however unpalatable, uncertain and difficult that may be.

The theme for the 16th NSW Coastal Conference is: - "The Tide is High – Coastal pressures, climate change, sustainability – the way forward".

The conference theme and the concurrent conference streams were sieved down; firstly from the papers delivered at all past coastal conferences by many people; and secondly we sourced the Federal Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council document entitled :- “National Cooperative approach to Integrated Coastal Zone Management – Framework and Implementation Plan”.

When bidding to hold this conference one year ago at Coffs Harbour, I challenged delegates, that whilst our coastal conferences since 1991 had accumulated good data and knowledge on coastal issues, where had all that knowledge gone? How had it been utilised?

Unfortunately I believe we have not focused sufficiently on assembling and collating that wealth of knowledge, or on transforming the data into sound coastal policy principles to take to peak local government associations and key government agencies and to lobby such policy principles to State and Federal governments.

In my view the primary goal of this 16th Coastal Conference ought to be to take up this challenge, and to formulate and lobby core coastal policy principles.

Achieving such a goal at this third Yamba Coastal Conference would also be a wonderful way of building a meaningful and lasting tribute to our late friend and colleague Councillor Joy Mathews.

I believe that we must urgently price pollution, and that people cannot continue to pollute and not be penalised. We also need a revolution in sourcing energy; for example in transport, in power, in the home. We need much more energy efficiency. We need alternate clean energy technologies.

Local Government can play a major role in much of this. We have strong links and connection to community as on-the-ground leaders and achievers.

Local government has a clear responsibility to respond to community concerns on climate change. Local government must also accept a lead role in highlighting and educating communities about the increasing reservoir of workable climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

Clarence Valley Council has initiated a range of participatory actions concerning climate change, as I am sure other councils will also have done.

For example my Council has signed up to; the Cities for Climate Protection Program; Council undertook the first in NSW, Community Climate Challenge promoted by the Nature Conservation Council, and last month council agreed to sign up to the NSW Mayor's Agreement on Climate Change.

At a Council policy level, several initiatives have been agreed to, framed around the elements and objectives of Council's Sustainability Framework. At an operational level Council has some very encouraging achievements but there is much more to do.

Local government in my view also needs help. It needs additional legislation to enforce planning constraints so that we can directly plan for climate change.

Presently local government's hands are clearly tied in planning terms in respect of mitigating against climate change impacts.

Local government needs for example to be able to plan, given the certainty of future massive fires, floods, category 5 cyclones and the like, so that in the year 2100, buildings will still be safe.

Without doubt we are all challenged by the complexity; by the need for integrated responses.

Yes our challenges are onerous and require a global response. But a global response can only occur if there is individual commitment.

Ultimately individuals, people, you and I will have to make a difference. Adequately addressing global warming will I believe eventually come down to people power and grass roots will.

We need to change our behaviour, to commit to doing things differently, for example to travel less, and in lieu to use family friendly video conferencing and the like. Don't we owe this to future generations?

We need a new culture as a nation to clean up our act, by our own actions. The next ten years must be a period of massive transformation.

Let us vigorously discuss and debate this most challenging issue over the next two days

I warmly welcome delegates to the 16th NSW Coastal Conference. May this Yamba conference truly make a difference because yes, the tide is high.

Ian Tiley
Mayor Clarence Valley Council
8th November 2007