

Community and Strategic Infrastructure Mayoral Column Daily Examiner March 2008

Australian councils are responsible for more than \$12 billion of community infrastructure. Local Government through the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) has called for provision of \$250million for four years for the renewal and replacement of ageing community infrastructure such as swimming pools, libraries, galleries, museums, sporting facilities, community centres, walking and cycle paths etc

Your Council is strongly supportive of the strategic priority of the (ALGA) to secure from the Rudd government for Australian communities a greater investment in community and strategic infrastructure through local government.

Community infrastructure renewal is about enhancing social capital and assisting in attracting and retaining workers and entrepreneurs into local communities. Such infrastructure could include for example, childcare, public halls, boat ramps, playground equipment, public spaces and the like. Community activity and lifestyle could be readily enhanced by solid commitment to renewal.

The inability of local government to provide a higher level of services to communities throughout Australia should be a matter of concern at all levels of government.

Legislation establishing Infrastructure Australia has been introduced into the first session of the new Parliament. It is encouraging that local government will have representation on the twelve member Infrastructure Australia statutory advisory council.

Its immediate task over the next twelve months is to audit the nation's infrastructure shortfalls and to produce an Infrastructure Priority List to guide future public and private investment.

Research undertaken in the past two years by Access Economics, National Economics and also Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) has clearly informed ALGA of the increasing financial challenges facing local government.

PwC has confirmed an infrastructure backlog in local government assets alone of about \$14.5 billion which is rapidly growing with an annual

underspend on renewals of \$1.1 billion. PwC proved there is a funding gap of around \$2.16 billion per annum to clear the backlog and correct the underspend.

Infrastructure Australia must play a lead role in continuing investment into national transport systems at levels at least equivalent to current Auslink funding. The quarantining to local government and long term continuation of the much valued Roads to Recovery (R2R2) Federal funding is vitally important to enable accelerated road upgrades in the future. R2R2 has already enabled several much needed road upgrades in the Clarence Valley. Long term commitment by Federal government to R2R2 is vitally important to your Council and to each of us.

Ian Tiley
Mayor Clarence Valley Council
17th March 2008