

Rural and Regional Taskforce meeting – 30th October 2007 Grafton – Mayor's welcome.

Good morning and welcome, upon behalf Council and the people of our Clarence Valley, to the City of Grafton and our magnificent Clarence Valley.

Welcome to this important 5th of 6 community consultation forums, as we from a local government perspective, examine the many issues affecting the communities we represent. No doubt we will energetically and positively offer good ideas about solutions.

Welcome to the Taskforce members, Acting Chair Hon Steve Whan, Member for Monaro and convenor of Country Labor and Hon Richard Torbay, Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly, Member for Northern Tablelands.

Thanks Uncle Rex Marshall for your welcome to country. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of these lands, the Gumbadgir, Bungelung and Yaegl peoples and pay respect to their elders past and present.

I welcome State parliamentarians, Mayors and councillors and Agency CEO's and representatives.

Clarence Valley Council, on the mighty Clarence, the largest river and floodplain in eastern Australia, is a 2004 amalgamation of six former councils, has over 50,000 constituents, Grafton city and 42 other towns and villages, an area of 10,440 sq km and over 600 employees, making council easily the largest employer in the Valley.

One week ago Council was highly commended in the prestigious NSW A R Bluett Memorial Award for best performing Council, won by Goulburn-Mulwarree council.

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 new state of the art Information Technology system.

A couple of weeks ago our Auditor confirmed that Clarence Valley Council was in a very good financial position as at 30/06/2007. We have sound financial ratios in all areas and a healthy working capital position.

So much for the questionable Sustainability of Councils Report released a week ago. Clarence Valley Council will be sustainable into the long term.

As leader of Clarence Valley Council I am proud of Councils achievements thus far. However there is much more to do to solidify the sound platform now established.

I state without reservation that Clarence Valley Council, with much goodwill and cooperation between councillors, staff and our community has made the council amalgamation work for the people we represent.

From a new beginning, we have many achievements already, with our sustainability framework, which ensures the thread of sustainability through all of council decision making, a raft of other economic, social and cultural plans and various strategies. We remain determined and focused, that Council will be leaders in local government across our nation and will always show our community that we are serious about beneficial reform.

My hope today is that these remarks may engender a refreshed mindset, a tone of enthusiastic optimism for the future of our industry, our local councils and those we serve.

Councils in this region of NSW need to continue our sound strategic planning successes and to carefully plan for what must be a sustainable, but will also be an exciting future. We are embracing asset management strategies which are a must do for all councils.

The North Coast of NSW has become very much a sea change destination and lifestyle region. We face ever growing community expectations for new and revitalised infrastructure especially in health, roads, water and sewerage. Councils are also at the coalface of expectations in respect of the great challenge of our time, climate change and global warming.

An impediment this region definitely does not need is for Planning Minister Sartor to reduce developer contributions which are so vital for the wellbeing of our communities. Developer contribution reductions would be a devastating body blow to local government which would simply return greater profits to developers but leave our communities with lessened amenity and lifestyle.

The current Nathan Rees review of water and sewerage service provision must not be allowed to result in any reduction of local ownership of this

infrastructure as occurred with the loss of electricity community assets some years ago. The safe, secure water supply now being delivered to Coffs and Clarence communities clearly demonstrates what councils can achieve cooperatively.

We in local government are well placed and competent to meet the challenges ahead BUT to do so we must have a federal growth tax, at least a 1% share of the Commonwealth pool of income tax receipts, as well as access to some form of Federal Infrastructure Renewals Fund.

Our future in Rural and Regional communities is in my view essentially about developing more close linkages and genuine partnership especially with State and Federal governments, to deliver desired outcomes for the people we serve. Our constituents deserve nothing less.

Enjoy your stay in Grafton city and let's hope that the Taskforce and this forum opportunity will help make a real difference for those we serve.

Ian Tiley
Mayor
Clarence Valley Council
30th October 2007