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21 June 2013

The Mayor
Port Macquarie-Hastings Council
PO Box 84
Port Macquarie NSW 2444

Re: The Importance of Council Managing Environmental Issues Effectively

Dear Peter,

We understand that shortly there is to be a review of the way the portfolios assigned to Councillors has been operating over the last six months. As part of this review Bonny Hills Progress Association (BHPA) would like to contribute and provide insights into the Bonny Hills Community's views on the importance of the environment.

Bonny Hills residents are in fact no different to residents in other parts of our LGA in terms of the importance they place on maintaining the integrity of our beautiful coastal environment. Community consultation by BHPA (and Council) about what people value as part of living in this area repeatedly rates the environment high on the list of priorities. As such it is embedded in the Bonny Hills Vision Statement which forms part of the BHPA Charter.

So there should be little disagreement about the high level of importance the community at large places on maintaining the integrity of our flora and fauna – both terrestrial and marine - and on minimising negative impacts on these and associated factors like water quality in streams and the ocean.

Having established this, and given that Council allocates a significant proportion of its resources to its Director of Development and the Environment, it seems incongruous that there is no Portfolio assigned to champion this important area. It seems far too glib and even a tad cynical to take the view that as all Councillors should be keeping their eyes on environmental impacts as part of their existing portfolios, why separate it from all other issues.

The reason why separation is required is that there is serious potential for Gamekeeper – Poacher conflict here. This conflict is generally well understood by State and Federal Governments and hence the separation we normally see between development oriented and environmental protection agencies.

Recommendation: That in addition to all Councillors being asked to be aware of environmental impacts as part of their existing portfolios, a separate Environmental Portfolio be established to act as a truly independent umpire and champion for the environment, and to work alongside the Director of Development and the Environment.

Commendation: BHPA regards very highly the work being conducted by Mr Matt Rogers and his team in developing detailed maps of flora and fauna resources across the LGA with the ultimate aim of developing a comprehensive Biodiversity Strategy. This outcome will be a pivotal resource and guide to the appropriateness of future developments, and will align squarely with community expectations.

This program of work is in fact an excellent example of why an independent Portfolio Manager is required.

We trust these views are of value to you as part of your imminent review.

Yours sincerely

Phil Hafey
Secretary

Cc General Manager
Cc Matt Rogers