

SINGLETON

ADVOCACY AGENDA UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2020



SINGLETON
COUNCIL



Complete



INCREASED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICES TO AND FROM SINGLETON

Seek commitment to fully fund an increased level of service

Following decades of lobbying, the push for more train services has steamed ahead in Singleton. In 2019, Singleton Council in partnership with the Two More Trains for Singleton group continued to advocate to the state government via correspondence and meetings with government ministers, members of parliament and Transport for NSW executive staff. Minister for Regional Transport and Roads Paul Toole announced in October 2019 that two new direct train services would operate between Singleton and Newcastle seven days a week starting in early 2020, giving customers six return options from Sydney and Newcastle on weekdays and four on weekends. This is a major success and one that demonstrates the value of advocacy and, more importantly, how partnering with our community can create positive changes for Singleton.

Council will continue to partner with the Two More Trains for Singleton group as we push for a long-term commitment to the increased level of service. Council will also work with Two More Trains for Singleton to generate community awareness, use and adoption of the service. Improved access to the "new" Maitland hospital will be a focus for the future.



REVISION TO ROADS AND MARITIME (RMS) CONTRACT TO IMPROVE MAINTENANCE OF NEW ENGLAND HIGHWAY

Seek commitment from the NSW government to extend the RMS maintenance contract to include the entire New England Highway corridor in Singleton

After years of negotiations, in mid-2019 Singleton Council received formal advice from RMS that Council was awarded the maintenance contract of the New England Highway in Singleton. The major gateways into the Singleton township have become even more welcoming, with more than 103,000 square metres of roadside improved with more frequent mowing and landscaping. Council now maintains the landscaping in medians and verges along the entire state-owned New England Highway corridor through Singleton, which also marks the beginning of the implementation of Council's Thoroughfare Beautification Scheme through Singleton's main traffic routes, showcasing our local government area to passing motorists. The upgrades to the Gowrie Gates rail bridge was a key component of this process and Council is rightfully satisfied in the improved visual amenity of this area. The revised contract with RMS is testimony that Council can work collaboratively with the State Government to deliver a high quality service to our community.





IMPROVED RESOURCES FOR REGIONS FUNDING PROGRAM

Seek commitment to allocate a fixed percentage of total royalties to mining-affected communities, based on the quantity of royalties from that LGA

The Resources for Region program was established to benefit mining-affected communities in NSW, yet Singleton – which contributes \$340 million in royalties to the State's coffers each year – continues to miss out.

This issue has been raised in many forums including correspondence and meetings with Deputy Premier, government ministers, members of the opposition, local members of parliament, the Minerals Council of Australia and industry.

Mayor of Singleton Cr Sue Moore and Singleton Council General Manager Jason Linnane have met with the Deputy Premier John Barilaro MP on several occasions to discuss the Resources for Regions program, where it was agreed that the program as it stands is not delivering what is expected, and that significant change is required. In April 2019, Mr Barilaro publically pledged to overhaul the program after it was announced that Singleton was to miss out yet again in round six of funding.

The Mayor and General Manager have been active participants in the formal review of the program — as members of the Mining and Energy Related Councils, and independently as representatives of our community. This has involved a series of meetings with Department of Premier and Cabinet executive staff, Mining and Energy Related Councils and other stakeholders.

In November 2019, the Department of Premier and Cabinet released its findings from the strategic review process. The findings fully support what Council has been advocating for, that is that the program needed to:

- Be linked to level of mining affectation with set allocation based on level of affectation
- Remove BCR requirements
- Remove co-contribution requirements
- Simplified application process
- Allow funding of programs that help communities manage impacts of mining and not be restricted to infrastructure works only

Council's General Manager has been invited, and accepted, to work with the Department of Premier and Cabinet to develop new guidelines for the program in early 2020. We look forward to progressing the review process and getting the outcomes our community deserves from this program.



Progressing



SINGLETON BYPASS

Seek commitment from Federal and State governments to fully fund and construct the Singleton Bypass project before 2024

In 2019, Singleton Council continued to lobby the state and federal governments for commitments to the Singleton Bypass project, including numerous letters and meetings with ministers, members of parliament, opposition members of parliament and RMS executive staff. The Singleton Bypass was a key state and federal election issue in 2019 with varying levels of commitment.

In late 2019, the Singleton Bypass moved one step closer following the release of a concept design and review of environmental factors (REF) for community feedback. Singleton Council will now review the REF and make a formal submission in the first quarter of 2020. While we know this project will address current and future traffic demands, easing congestion and improving journeys for motorists and freight, Council needs to ensure that our community gains the very best level of service, as well as ensure the Singleton CBD is provided with every opportunity to flourish as a result of the project.

Council will continue to lobby for a commitment to funding from all sides of politics at both state and federal government levels. Council will focus on ensuring the funding of the project is not used for political purposes at the expense of our community.

Council will also continue to partner with the Whittingham community as they push for improvements and speed zone reviews for this part of the New England Highway.



UPGRADES TO SINGLETON POLICE STATION AND APPROPRIATE STAFFING

Seek commitment to fully fund the construction of a new police station or major expansion of the Singleton Police Station

Seek commitment for the appropriate allocation of staffing numbers to enable 24 hours operation of the station

The Singleton Police Station was designed in 1896 and, as it stands, has limited operational capacity. The size and complexities of the Singleton community warrant a 24 hour-manned police station.

This matter was a key state election issue in 2019. Last year, Singleton Council continued to lobby the state government, including numerous letters and meetings with ministers, members of parliament, opposition members of parliament, the Police Association of NSW and local police. Council will continue to lobby the current government to gain a commitment to the upgrade, staffing level increase and 24-hour operations, and partner with the Police Association of NSW and our local police officers who deserve better as they continue to provide incredible service to our community.



LEGISLATED FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTARY PLANNING AGREEMENTS

Seek to ensure relevant agencies provide a policy framework, systems and processes that provide clear direction on how the Voluntary Planning Agreement process should be managed and deployed

As it stands, there is a policy and direction void for both council and the mining industry when it comes to negotiating Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPA) for mining projects causing major frustration, wasted effort and an inefficient use of resources. In 2019, Council continued to work with the Mining and Energy Related Council and the Minerals Council of Australia to develop a framework. This has progressed and includes improved options for the VPA process to be managed.

Singleton Council have also developed and successfully implemented our own approach to the VPA process, which includes the recent adoption of the Community and Economic Development Fund Policy. This approach, in partnership with industry, is ground-breaking and will enable Council to deliver true socio-economic outcomes through services and programs that help to improve living standards and promote health and wellbeing for local people in response to the impact of mining, as well as encouraging innovation, supporting and growing jobs and increasing business profitability.



ONGOING FUNDING OF HUNTER JOINT ORGANISATION OF COUNCILS

Seek commitment to the ongoing funding of \$300,000 for Joint Organisations

The Joint Organisations of councils (JO) is an important initiative to build stronger councils, improve service delivery and infrastructure across regional communities. In late 2019, the NSW Government announced that it will provide an extra \$150,000 for the Hunter Joint Organisations. While much welcomed, this needs to be provided as a specific allocation to support the development of JO's for the long term and built into legislation.

Singleton Council will continue to partner with the other councils of the Hunter Valley and Local Government NSW to drive this agenda with the state government.





COMMITMENT TO RESOURCING POST-MINING LAND USE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

Seek commitment to develop a transparent land use-based policy position on final mining land use that align with local strategic land use planning outcomes, and ensure current and future socio-economic considerations are managed appropriately

The current approval process for mining projects creates a disconnect between local land use planning outcomes, community expectation and post-mining land use. Singleton Council has raised these issues in many forums, including correspondence and meetings with ministers, members of the opposition, local members of parliament, the Minerals Council of Australia, industry, the Independent Planning Commission, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, and executive staff of the state government.

Council's submissions to the Independent Planning Commission included requests for improved conditions to help gain better process and outcomes for local communities. Whilst we have not been able to achieve exactly what we requested, we have certainly gained better conditions of consent which require more focus on post-mining land use.

The Hunter Joint Organisation of council's has formally supported the creation of a Transition Foundation and preliminary planning work and engagement activities have commenced. Singleton Council will continue to work with all stakeholders to push these issues, which are mission critical for not only the Singleton LGA but the broader Hunter region.



LEADERSHIP AND RESOURCES TO HELP RESPOND TO RECYCLING ISSUES

Seek commitment to actively work with industry and local government to develop a viable strategic policy position

Seek funding commitment to ensure the community's recycling expectations are met

Our recycling service continues in 2020 at an affordable price and with assurance that the material is not going to landfill here in Australia or overseas. On a strategic level, we have formally supported Local Government NSW and the Australian Local Government Association campaigns that continue to call on the state and federal government to demonstrate the required level of leadership and resourcing that this critical issue requires. We have actively raised the issue within many forums including correspondence and meetings with ministers, members of the opposition, local members of parliament and industry.

Locally, we are working in unison with the other councils of the Hunter as we work together on developing regional responses to this matter. As a member of the Hunter Resource Recovery (HRR), we will continue to work with our partners to deliver advocacy, improved service delivery opportunities and better outcomes for our environment. This is issue needs urgent leadership and investment by the state and federal governments.





UPPER HUNTER WATER SECURITY PLANNING, WORKS AND PROTECTION OF WATER UTILITY STATUS

Seek commitment to protect Singleton's water utility business and services

Seek commitment to fund Hunter Valley drought minimisation planning

Singleton Council has reviewed several briefings by Water NSW on the Upper Hunter Water Security Plan. This has included options to develop a two-way potable water pipeline between Singleton and Hunter Water Corporation, connecting Lostock Dam to Lake St Clair, and the possible grey water transfer to the Upper Hunter.

Staff have actively participated in the planning works for the two-way potable water pipeline between Singleton and Hunter Water Corporation to ensure the needs of our community are protected. We are aware that planning has commenced for the Lostock to Lake St Clair connection.

Mayor of Singleton Cr Sue Moore has corresponded with the Minister for Water, Property and Housing Melinda Pavey MP to gain assurance that the ongoing operation of our water utility was not at risk with any of the planning that is being undertaken or future works that may be completed. This has since been confirmed by Minister Pavey.

Council will continue to advocate and work with all stakeholders for the drought proofing of the Hunter Valley, the continued operation of the Singleton Water and Sewer utility and improvements in water supply for our villages.



RETURN OF 100% INCOME OF WASTE LEVY TO COUNCILS TO FUND MINIMISATION PROGRAMS

Seek commitment for 100% of the waste levy to be returned to local governments for community waste minimisation and recycling programs

On a strategic level, Singleton Council has formally supported the Local Government NSW campaign, which continues to call on the state and federal government to demonstrate the required level of leadership and resourcing that this critical issue requires, and the return of waste levies to fund required planning and infrastructure development.

Council has actively raised this issue within many forums including correspondence and meetings with ministers, members of the opposition, local members of parliament and industry.

To date, we have not been successful, but will continue to advocate that these funds need to be returned to local communities for investment in planning and infrastructure to address the changing requirements in waste management, especially recycling.





ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH POWER STATIONS AND MINES

Seek commitment to develop a transparent cumulative impact policy position on amenity from mining and power stations that align with local planning outcomes and community expectations

The current approval process for mining and power station projects excludes detailed and transparent consideration of the cumulative amenity impacts on communities such as air quality, noise and visual impacts. Council provided a submission to a recent federal government review of air quality standards, requesting that the Hunter Valley, and all regional areas, to be treated the same as our cities and for the standards to be improved to reflect the world's best practice. The review process has not yet been completed, and we await to hear of its findings.

These issues have been raised in many forums including correspondence and meetings with ministers, members of the opposition, local members of parliament, the Minerals Council of Australia, industry, the Independent Planning Commission, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, and executive staff of state government.

Submissions to the Independent Planning Commission have included requests for broader consideration of cumulative impacts and how they need to be managed.

Council received a formal presentation on this matter at its November 2019 meeting, and a delegation from the NSW opposition came to Singleton late 2019 to discuss this matter with Council.

Additionally, the recent Council adoption of the Community and Economic Development Fund Policy, in partnership with industry, is ground-breaking and will enable Council to deliver true socio-economic outcomes for our community.

Council will continue with all stakeholders to increase understanding and progress these issues.



CHANGES TO COST SHIFTING MODEL IMPOSED BY STATE GOVERNMENT

Seek commitment that no new, increased or transferred responsibilities will be imposed on local government without a sufficient, corresponding source of revenue or revenue-raising capacity

Cost shifting is one of the most significant problems faced by councils in NSW, as it undermines the financial sustainability of our sector by forcing councils to assume responsibility for more infrastructure and services, without sufficient corresponding revenue. This issue has been raised in many forums including correspondence and meetings with ministers, members of the opposition and local members of parliament. Recent examples during local government elections, waste management, and the emergency services levy indicate that we have a significant ongoing challenge in front of us

Council will continue to support Local Government NSW in their attempts to address the issues at a strategic level while advocating our local needs with all sides of politics.





EXPANSION OF HEALTH SERVICES IN SINGLETON

Seek commitment to maintaining and expanding health services in Singleton

There is a limited number of specialist health services in Singleton. Council's baseline study of Singleton identified a myriad of healthcare needs for our community, including but not limited to: after-hours GP services, oncology, improved maternity ward facilities, ophthalmology, mental health, provision of a sexual assault counsellor and MRI services. This was a key state election issue in 2019.

This issue has been raised in many forums including correspondence and meetings with ministers, members of the opposition and local members of parliament.

Council will continue to lobby the current government to gain a commitment to improving health services in Singleton, and we will partner with local health practitioners who deserve better as they continue to provide incredible service to our community.



COMMITMENT TO THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY AND IMPROVED DROUGHT SUPPORT

Seek commitment to an increase in drought support

Seek commitment to fund identified infrastructure development that aids rural community

According to the NSW Department of Primary Industry, NSW is now 100% drought affected. Consequently, Singleton Council's focus throughout 2019 was on drought resilience, advocating for the support that our community deserves, yet disappointingly has missed out on (with the exception of a \$4.25million state government grant that Council received for a roads program).

The issue of drought support has been covered widely in local, state and national news. Mayor of Singleton Cr Sue Moore has written to and spoken personally to the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael McCormack MP on the matter as well as the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management David Littleproud MP. The Mayor and General Manager have also discussed the matter personally with the member for the Hunter Joel Fitzgibbon MP, Member for the Upper Hunter Michael Johnsen MP, the Member for Cessnock Clayton Barr MP, the Leader of the Opposition Jodi McKay MP and the Shadow Minister for Local Government Greg Warren MP.



ONGOING LEADERSHIP TO ADDRESS IMPACT OF FLYING-FOX COLONY ON COMMUNITY

Seek commitment to improve legislative environment concerning flying-fox colonies

Seek funding commitment for research activities and to assist Council in managing the impact of flying-fox colonies on our local community

Singleton's flying-fox colony has been present in Burdekin Park for almost two decades. While Council continues to observe decreased numbers of flying fox in Burdekin Park, their presence remains an ongoing area of concern for our community, especially during heat stress events.

Staff have worked with the environmental division of the Hunter Joint Organisations of Council to progress regional planning and education programs.

Council will reinvigorate efforts to have increased state and federal government leadership around planning and resourcing the management and maintenance of flying-fox camps.

Limited progress



REVIEW OF THE STANDARD INSTRUMENT LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN (LEP) FOR RURAL LANDHOLDERS

Seek commitment to review the standard instrument LEP for dwelling entitlement to provide certainty and flexibility for rural residents

The introduction of standard instrument LEP has resulted in an inability to provide flexibility to new property owners to build dwellings where it is difficult to ascertain existing property entitlements, creating undue stress on new property owners.

While included in our broader advocacy communications, due to priorities, this issue has not been at the forefront of conversations.



SIMPLIFICATION OF STATE-DELIVERED GRANT PROGRAMS

Seek commitment to provide an annual grant funding allocation for economic and social infrastructure that is evenly distributed to each local government area

NSW government grant funding is vitally important to our ability to upgrade economic and social infrastructure. While included in our broader advocacy communications, due to priorities, this issue has not been at the forefront of conversations.

It is noted that the review of the Resources for Regions program has indicated a need to simplify the application process. This is an outcome that Council has strongly advocated for.



ADDRESS OVERCROWDING AT SINGLETON HIGH SCHOOL

Seek commitment to lead a review process to ensure that the Singleton High School enrolment ceiling is not exceeded, or above 100% utilisation

There are fears among the Singleton community that the Singleton High School campus is overcrowded. This shortfall highlights the chronic underfunding of public education, and the lack of planning foresight shown by several governments to predict booms in enrolments.

While included in our broader advocacy communications, due to priorities, this issue has not been at the forefront of conversations. Council staff have, however, held conversations with executive staff at the Department of Education and Communities in response to ministerials that have been raised, stemming from our advocacy efforts.

Council will engage with the principal of Singleton High School throughout 2020 to determine the most effective means of progressing this matter.



ONGOING COMMITMENT AND EXPANSION OF TAFE SERVICES IN SINGLETON

Seek commitment to provide ongoing support to the Singleton TAFE campus, including the expansion of course offerings and trade training

Update: Singleton's TAFE campus is equipped with a connected learning centre. Given the centre's capacity to screen any course offerings provided by NSW TAFE, Council would like to see an expanded course offering by the Centre. As it stands, the limited course offering forces Singleton students to travel to other areas to receive this education. According to 2016 census data, 76% of qualifications obtained by Singleton residents are completed through TAFE or other registered training providers.

While included in our broader advocacy communications, due to priorities, this issue has not been at the forefront of conversations.

Through Council's socio-economic programs, we will engage with TAFE NSW and our local member, Member for the Upper Hunter Michael Johnsen MP throughout 2020 to determine the most effective manner to progress this matter





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