

# Council morale frustrations

Stories by Helen Manusu

A LEADING NSW workers' union has taken exception to a recent statement by Greater Taree City mayor Paul Hogan about the morale of council staff.

In a brief article titled 'Planning delays frustrating to council staff too' in the Manning River Times on August 3, Cr Hogan conceded "staff morale could be better".

The mayor's comment was in response to the number of planning department positions which have remained vacant for many months, which are leading to delays for ratepayers going through council's approvals process.

In several cases council has had to re-advertise positions, and the mayor conceded the delays were frustrating both the public and council staff.

Cr Hogan said there had been an overall shortage of planning staff, "not just in our council, but elsewhere as well", and that a re-structured salary system was "having an impact".

Mayor Hogan's comment about the level of staff morale has angered the Development and Environmental Professionals Association (DEPA) which is locked in a long running dispute with council over two staffing issues.

With no resolution on the horizon, the two matters will now go to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission for arbitration, set down for hearing by Commissioner Ritchie in Sydney on November 29 and 29.

DEPA secretary, Ian Robertson yesterday labelled the mayor's comment about morale "an understatement", and blamed council's inability to satisfactorily negotiate award issues with certain employees as being at the heart of "the morale problem".

"We are currently in dispute with Greater Taree City Council over two outstanding issues involving employees Brad McCarron and Jim Boyce," Mr Robertson said.

"The first is the provision of two salary steps for Brad McCarron consistent with rules of the salary system, and the second is the payment of a redundancy to Jim Boyce after his position was removed in a restructure and the alternative position - despite assurances it would be only minor changes from his old job - being substantially different."

Mr Robertson claimed council's long-running dealings in particular with Mr Boyce - a long-time staff member - amounted to "persecution".

"The reason there are shortages in council's planning and building staff is not because there is a shortage in the industry, but because the council won't appoint building surveyors at anywhere above the minimum entry level, even though they advertise the

## GTCC: Arbitration hearing situation explained

GREATER Taree City Council yesterday provided the following explanation of the situation regarding employees Jim Boyce and Brad McCarron, which has led to the arbitration hearing:

"Council's team leader of building services, Jim Boyce is seeking a redundancy from council.

"Jim Boyce agreed to be placed in the role of team leader, building services, after the manager building services role was replaced by the senior leader regulatory services as part of council's restructure in 2010.

"The manager development control and manager environmental health were similarly placed in team leader roles as part of the restructure.

"All three staff members agreed to the change and retain their previous salary. All three previous managers declined to accept the role of senior leader regulatory services.

"More than one year into the new role, Jim Boyce is contending before the Industrial Relations Commission that he should have been made redundant.

"Council believes he accepted his new role in good faith and is not entitled to more than \$60k in redundancy payments. In the meantime Mr Boyce continues to be employed by council.

"DEPA are challenging the right of senior building surveyor Brad McCarron to receive more than one step increase in pay through his performance assess-

ment in 2010/11.

"Mr McCarron requested a two step increase. No other staff member received more than one step in 2010/11.

"Mr McCarron was acting manager building services while Mr Boyce was on extended leave for most of 2010/11 and received higher duties allowance for the period.

"Mr Boyce supported Mr McCarron's step increase despite being absent overseas for most of the period. Mr McCarron's request for a step increase was not supported by his senior leader or executive leader. Mr Boyce is the DEPA delegate for Greater Taree City Council and a vice president of the State DEPA management committee."

## Services union watchful of restructure

GREATER Taree City Council's restructure last year appears to be at the heart of many staffing and morale issues now surfacing within the organisation.

The Development and Environmental Professionals Association (DEPA) is not the only union helping its members employed by the council to find their way through the difficult restructuring process.

The United Services Union (USU) is also involved, distributing among its Taree members a flyer which asks 'Greater Taree Restructure: Are you getting a fair go?' The union is inviting members still having problems as a result of the restructure to liaise with it, in the hope of gaining solutions. The flyer asks members who may still be waiting for a copy of their new or updated position descriptions to contact it, and to inform also of any issues members may have raised with management that remain unresolved.

job with a range that does attract good potential employees," Mr Robertson claimed.

He has fired off a strongly worded letter to Cr Hogan, warning Greater Taree City Council will continue to lose "good potential employees" because of its own actions.

"They will be lost because they apply for a job with an attractive salary range but you insist on offering entry level only, despite a candidate's experience," the letter says.

"But the council is then quite happy to spend more money advertising again in a way that won't be any more successful, and all the time you run the place understaffed and people are unhappy.

"How does that make any sense and what do you think happens to morale?"

Mr Robertson alleged that with regard to the current industrial dispute, "council would rather pay a lawyer \$3000 or so a day when you could have done the right thing by (staff) for much, much less. "How does that make sense?" he asks in his letter to the mayor.

"And of course most of your employees are now distressed because of the decision by the council to remove an entitlement to

employees as a gratuity on resignation.

"If you remove something that people think is a condition of their employment you have to accept people will be distressed and morale will plummet."

Mr Robertson said his union and council both have a common interest in ensuring the council is properly staffed, fully resourced and that the employees are doing a good job and happy to be working there.

"I'm doing my bit by trying to fix things in industrial disputes but I wonder what you're doing apart from saying that you are happy with the steps council's senior staff are taking, when we think the steps they are taking are moving morale down, down, down," his letter says.

Mr Robertson said yesterday there was a stark contrast between neighbouring Great Lakes Council and Greater Taree City Council, with regard to matters which impact on staff morale.

He said his union had not had an industrial dispute at Great Lakes "for decades".

Mr Robertson and representatives of two other unions last week attended a presentation by Great Lakes Council management on

"Do you feel as though you have picked up an extraordinary amount of work and are not being rewarded for doing so?" the flyer asks. "The only way to effect change in this matter is to lodge a grievance and we are there to help you through the process."

USU official Narelle Rich said this week the union will continue to work for its members to ensure a "fair go" in their workplace.

"The award is very prescriptive of how these things must run," Mrs Rich said. "We are committed to working within the award to ensure our members' rights are met. "It is our members' responsibility to try and make resolutions at a local level with their management, but if this does not happen, the matter will progress to the Industrial Commission.

"My understanding is that there are a number of issues involving Greater Taree City Council, and we will continue to follow the award process."

that council's proposed service review.

"It was consultative, guaranteeing the sharing of information and looking for partnerships with employees to deal with what was perceived as a common problem," Mr Robertson said.

"There was no issue of reducing staff entitlements and not even any contemplation of such a course of action. What a change from Taree," he said.

He also had a meeting with Great Lakes' members of his union and found "a fairly high level of staff morale because of a benign and open approach to managing employees", which he said was in contrast to the situation at Taree.

He said there was general discussion during his visit to Great Lakes Council about the different approach at Taree, including the alleged attempts to cut back employee entitlements.

He alleged Greater Taree City Council harbours "a corporate approach of antagonism and hostility to our members and to DEPA", and that the situation was markedly different to that at Great Lakes Council.

## MANNING VALLEY BUSINESS AWARDS 2011

### Correction



### Wingham Motel

THE Manning River Times apologises to Wingham Motel owners, Roger, Debbie and Kathryn Storey, winners of the Manning Valley Business Awards 2011 for the hospitality and tourism section. The business was incorrectly named in yesterday's business awards feature.

Mother and daughter, Debbie and Kathryn (pictured) accepted the award at Friday's night gala dinner presentation.

### Sydney tables wait on our old bridge

A SYDNEY restaurant was yesterday reported awaiting a delivery from the Manning before it could open to the public.

The Sydney Morning Herald's Good Food section reported on a new wine bar at Randwick, Montpellier Public House, which was suppose to open to the public yesterday.

Owner Matt Kemp told Good Food the restaurant would open if its tabletops arrived in time, explaining that an old bridge 'up near Taree' was being demolished to make the tabletops.

### Malicious damage to vehicles

A MOTOR vehicle, parked outside a residence on Bushland Drive, Taree was maliciously damaged between 11.30am and 2pm on Monday.

Unknown persons smashed the rear window of the motor vehicle.

Another motor vehicle was damaged in Hillchrist Avenue, Wingham, this time overnight on Monday.

Sometime between 9pm and 5.50am on Tuesday the rear window of the vehicle was smashed before thieves made off with a handbag that contained a mobile phone.

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