

INQUIRY INTO INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION IN COASTAL GROWTH AREAS

Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works

BYRON SHIRE COUNCIL SUBMISSION

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Key coastal population growth and urban consolidation trends in NSW

Byron Shire is a fast growing coastal area, with an estimated annual population growth rate of 1.9%. The Shire has a population of approximately 30,000 (2001), with annual tourist visitation in the order of 1.75 million visitors per annum. At less than 200 km from Brisbane, and 100 from the Gold Coast, improvements to the Pacific Highway have made Byron Shire more accessible to both tourists and new residents in the past three years. Byron Bay is also an international tourist mecca, especially for backpackers. It is a small community, coping with changes and pressures that are beyond the resources of local government alone to manage.

2. Short and long term needs of coastal communities for basic infrastructure (such as roads, power, water and sewerage) and human services infrastructure (such as hospitals, schools, aged care centres and sporting facilities)

Basic Infrastructure

Increased demand for basic services associated with growth means infrastructure is often overloaded and degrading more quickly. In combination with regulatory and community demands for improved levels of service and performance, there is a major requirement for infrastructure to be replaced, upgraded and in some cases implemented for the first time.

It is important to note that in the coastal context, much of the service provision is extended to service tourism, which does not generate income for Council commensurate with the infrastructure demands. In particular, grants and funding allocated on a "per capita" basis often take into account resident population only, yet infrastructure must be provided to meet the demands of tourists and part-time residents for the peak periods.

Also, many coastal communities are evolving rapidly from villages, small towns, or semi-rural communities, where only basic services were ever provided in the past. Keeping rates low was often the highest priority in these areas. New residents coming from urban areas usually expect much higher levels of service. Rate pegging was introduced in 1977, and has restricted the ability of local governments to increase their rates to adjust to new demands. There has been no legislative review of what an adequate level of finances should be for effective local government service provision.

Meanwhile, increasing coastal property values have resulted in cutbacks to Federal Assistance Grants (FAG), on the basis that the community has increased capacity to pay. Byron Shire Council's FAG grant was reduced by approximately \$90,000 in 2004/05, on this basis, absorbing 1% of the 10% special rate variation approved by the Minister for the Shire for the financial year.

Water and Sewerage

In recent years, Byron Shire has been unable to provide sufficient basic infrastructure to meet demands. Developments that would increase sewerage loads are currently unable to be connected in five of the six sewerage catchments in the Shire. Consequently, Byron Shire is implementing a major water and sewerage program. This program will see over \$90 million dollars spent over the next five years. The burden to fund the infrastructure has predominantly fallen on the community of Byron Shire. As a consequence the rates are comparatively high.

Roads

There are a number of significant factors impacting on the Shire's roads infrastructure. Apart from the permanent population growth rate occurring with the "Sea change" there is a significant amount of tourism activity that is occurring due in part to the natural beauty of the area, facilitated by the ongoing upgrading of the Pacific Highway, particularly to Queensland. Day-trippers from Queensland's Gold Coast and Brisbane city and surrounds are attracted more regularly as the time taken to travel to Byron Bay reduces with each stage of the Highway upgrade.

The increasing amount of traffic activity on the main roads ultimately impacts on the local roads and not just in the town centre of Byron Bay. There is a spill over to Brunswick Heads, other town centres and to the Shire's hinterland where the roads were not initially constructed to accommodate these volumes and are not suitable for higher volumes of traffic without substantial upgrading, often in difficult terrain.

The Byron Bay town centre is the major tourist destination for the Shire and the demand for a town centre bypass is growing more urgent. There are a number of key factors holding back the progress in developing this town centre bypass, not least of which is the funding to build it. Despite the international status of Byron Bay as a tourist attraction, regularly used by the State and Federal governments in their promotional campaigns both within Australia and overseas, this critical road is a "local" responsibility. To date, no funding has been available from State or Federal Governments. Without such a Bypass, the traffic impact on Byron Bay is increasingly resulting in regular gridlock that has impacts beyond mere inconvenience.

Other support infrastructure where demands are growing include cycleways and footpath paving.

Matters outside of the Council and the local community influence create many of the impacts on Byron Shire's infrastructure. Byron Shire, in particular Byron Bay, has numerous annual special events, including internationally famous music festivals. Such events are attracting patronage of 15,000 or more to a venue. No matter how well managed they may be, such events have significant impacts on traffic, and additional garbage and sewage disposal demands, especially when they occur at peak periods.

The State Government has tourist campaigns encouraging people to drive around NSW. The State and Federal Government are funding the upgrade of the Pacific Highway and there are further upgrades planned within Queensland. With these influences comes the impact on a local community with the associated costs being beyond the ability of the Council to carry out upgrades. Without State and/or Federal assistance in some specific areas of concern such as:

- Funding assistance for the Byron Bay Town Centre Bypass;
- Intervention in the granting of a second road crossing of the rail corridor to facilitate the Bypass;
- Increases in the Roads Component of the Federal Assistance Grant (FAG);
- Increased funding assistance for Cycleways/foot paving; and

- Increased funding assistance to key tourist areas to support the state government push for increased tourism across the state.

Human Services Infrastructure

Many human issues arise in coastal growth areas, especially lack of affordable housing, lack of access to reliable, full-time employment, training and educational opportunities, and lack of affordable public transport to access what is available. Cancellation of the North Coast rail service has made access to these services even more difficult.

3. Coordination of commonwealth, state and local government strategies to deliver sustainable coastal growth and supporting infrastructure

Currently there is an initiative from local government to engage state and commonwealth levels of government on the issue of coastal growth and the associated impacts. To date there appears to be few relevant state and commonwealth strategies and very few programs that can make a material difference to the problems currently being experienced.

One example of a strategy that appears to be moving in the wrong direction is the NSW Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage program. The NSW State government has recently changed the guidelines and this has reduced the available subsidy to support infrastructure works in Byron Shire by \$6.2 million. Similar impacts have been experienced in other coastal council areas.

The State Government has recently cancelled train services on the Far North Coast, blaming the Federal Government for reducing funding to NSW. However, the rail line has not been a high priority for State government, and significant maintenance expenditure is needed.

Planning decisions at State and Commonwealth government levels have resulted in an ongoing demand for access and residency in coastal areas like Byron Shire. Yet there has been no coordinated assessment of infrastructure requirements and reliable funding.

In a high demand tourist environment, tax policies provide incentives to convert residences to holiday investment properties, at the expense of housing availability and affordability for local residents.

4. Best practice methods to plan, manage and provide infrastructure to coastal growth areas

A critical issue for Byron Shire Council is proximity to Queensland and the rapidly growing south-east corner extending from Brisbane through the Gold Coast hinterland to the border. The SEQ Regional Plan projects that the existing population will grow in this area from 2.5 million to 3.5 million. There is already significant pressure on the infrastructure of Byron Shire as a result of day trippers and short-term visitation from the SEQ region. Dr Ted Campbell, Queensland Director General of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation has acknowledged that the current pressures will only get worse. There is no responsibility for the Queensland state government to assist Byron Shire Council with the infrastructure demands associated with access and demand from the SEQ region. Ironically, plans to upgrade the Pacific Highway both north and south of the border will only make this problem worse as travel times continue to decrease.

5. Management of social, environmental and economic considerations associated with infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas

Many coastal areas have significant environmental, social and cultural values, including Aboriginal heritage values, that need to be respected in infrastructure provision. Many people

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have moved to coastal areas in an effort to escape urban environments, and they are particularly sensitive to change, to protecting the landscapes, to maintaining uncrowded access to recreational and natural environments, and to the value of the limited remaining cultural heritage. They often also have more time available to participate in community life than city residents. These factors mean that infrastructure provision needs to be approached in a far more inclusive, consultative way than in some less sensitive areas, where growth is seen as a goal in itself.

Provision of infrastructure can also be contentious because it is perceived as facilitating more growth, and contributing to the loss of the attributes that attracted people to the area in the first place. However, Byron Shire can attest that lack of infrastructure is also contentious, with the Council having expended much time and money in the Land and Environment Court defending decisions to limit development to reflect infrastructure capacity, particularly sewerage.

The cost of litigation on development matters in Byron Shire is of great concern to the Council and to the community.

BYRON SHIRE – COMMUNITY PROFILE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – SHIRE SNAPSHOT

Byron Shire is located on the Far North Coast of NSW and shares its boundaries with the Tweed, Lismore and Ballina Local Government Areas (LGA's). The Byron Shire community remains a diverse and colourful mix of people, with each of the towns and rural villages having their own distinctiveness, with a mix of cultural values, embracing a range of traditional and alternative lifestyles and philosophies.

SHIRE SNAPSHOT – Based on 2001 Census data

Population – 2001 (ABS)

28175 usual residents ^(U)
(30246) ^(B)

AREA

55,000 hectares

Growth Rate

1996 to 2001 = 9.7% ^(B) or 1.9% p.a.

Tourism – 2002 est. – Rob Tonge & Assoc

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)	158,370
Visitors in commercial Accommodation	1,014,240
Day Trippers	580,000
Total	1,752,000

\$306 million (est) per annum is injected into the local economy through tourism.

^(U) = Usual resident only

^(B) = Basic Community Profile

Population ^(U) – Small Towns and Villages / Rural

Bangalow	1218
Brunswick Heads	1666
Byron Bay	5241
Mullumbimby	3043
Ocean Shores/New Brighton	3453
South Golden Beach	1459
Suffolk Park	3212
Rural North	4809
Rural South	3695
Other residents (those not in the Shire on census night and unable to identify locality in which they reside)	379
Total	28175 ^(U) (30246) ^(B)

^(U) = Usual resident only

^(B) = Basic Community Profile = place of enumeration – includes residents and visitors located in Byron Shire on census night.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders = 347 ^(U) = 1.2% of Shire (NSW = 1.9%)

78% ^(B) of Shire = born in Australia (1996 census = 80.3% ^(B))

5% of Shire born in the UK

(4.3% of the population on census night were overseas visitors – more than double 1996 figure of 2% of the population.)

^(U) = Usual resident only ^(B) = Basic Community Profile includes residents and visitors on census night

Labour Force Status – 2001 (ABS)

Employed full time (42% of labour force)	5271 ^(U)
Employed part time (40% of labour force – this is the 2 nd highest proportion of part-time workers in NSW)	4875 ^(U)
Employed Total	10456 ^(U)
Unemployed	1,776 ^(U)
Not in labour force	8,634 ^(U)
Unemployment 15 – 24 years	22.16% ^(U)
Unemployment 15+	14.5% ^(U)

Age Groups

Children

Those age 0 – 4 years old	5.9% ^(U)
Those aged 5 – 9 years old	7.3% ^(U)

Young people

Those aged 10 – 14 yrs old	8.2% ^(U)
Those aged 15 – 19 years old	6.9% ^(U)

Older people

Those aged 65+ (3384)	12.0% ^(U)
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^(U) = Usual resident only

Median Age Byron Shire – 35, NSW 39

Household / Family Profile

Household Type

	Byron Shire	NSW
Family	68%	73%
Group	6%	4%
Lone Person	26%	23%

(12.3% of households in Byron Bay are group households – one of the highest proportions in NSW)

Family Household Type

	Byron Shire	NSW
Couple family With children	40%	48%
Couple family Without children	35%	35%
One parent family With children	24%	15%
Other family	1%	2%

Income

Median Weekly Individual Income:

Byron Shire \$200-299 NSW \$300-399

Median Weekly Family Income:

Byron Shire \$699-699 NSW \$800-899

Median Weekly Household Income:

Byron Shire \$500-599 NSW \$800-899

Housing

Median Weekly Rent

Byron Shire \$150-199 NSW \$150-199

Median Monthly Housing Loan Repayment

Byron Shire \$800-999 NSW \$1000-1199

Median Household Size

Byron Shire 2.4 NSW 2.6

Byron Shire Census History

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1976	10914
1981	15409
1986	18359
1991	22775
1996	27565
2001	30245 ^(B) = Basic Community
Profile and includes residents and domestic visitors on census night	
2001	28175 ^(U) = Usual resident only

Projected Population – Byron Shire

	2001	2004	2009	2014	2019
0-11	4894	4912	5099	5324	5559
12-24	5061	5348	5596	5808	5985
25-44	9030	9284	9796	10529	11052
45-54	4853	5393	6046	6269	6638
55-64	2416	2979	4108	4989	5650
65 and over	3495	3587	3874	4710	5872
All ages	29749	31503	34519	37629	40756

Source: ABS Regional Profile 2001

Which quotes from Population Projections ABS (Projections prepared by the ABS according to assumption agreed to by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care).

Industry

The major industries employing people in Byron Shire are Retail Trade (16.9%) with 1773 (compared to 1996:1470) employed, followed by Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants 1170 (compared to 1996:932), Health and Community Services 1123 (compared to 1996:936) and Education 946 (compared to 1996:780) Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing employed 5.6% (584) down from 7.6% in 1996 (697)

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