

**THE HILLS SHIRE COUNCIL**

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Mr Ninos Khoshaba MP  
Standing Committee on Public Works  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

**Email: [PUBWORKS@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:PUBWORKS@parliament.nsw.gov.au)**

Dear Mr Khoshaba

### **Inquiry Into Effects of Graffiti on Public Infrastructure**

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Council would like to thank the Standing Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry into the effects of graffiti on public infrastructure.

Like most local government authorities, The Hills Shire Council (THSC) has experienced ongoing problems with damage to public infrastructure by graffiti vandals for some years. This damage has both a social and economic impact on Council and its community. It significantly reduces the amenity of an area and requires the allocation of valuable resources to control the problem.

Council has always adopted a 'no tolerance' approach to the presence of any type of graffiti. Both Council staff and residents are actively encouraged to report the presence of graffiti on any type of property, regardless of ownership, through Council's electronic Customer Request System, an 'eRequest' link on Council's website or a dedicated Vandalism Hotline.

In the case of graffiti on Council owned infrastructure, Works Requests are generated and electronically distributed to either a member of staff or specialized contractor to arrange for the removal of the graffiti. At present Council endeavours to remove such graffiti within three working days of being reported. With the introduction of legislative powers to control graffiti on private property, Council has also chosen to use such powers to remove graffiti from such property where it is accessible from a public place. With graffiti on public utility authority or State Government owned infrastructure, its presence is reported directly to the relevant organization for removal.

During 2007/08 and 2008/09 Council spent \$150,000 and \$180,000 respectively on graffiti removal from both public infrastructure and private property that is accessible from a public place. Based on current trends, expenditure on graffiti removal for 2009/10 is anticipated to be in the order of \$140,000.

The most commonly used methods of removing graffiti are by high pressure cleaning equipment, specialized graffiti removal solvents or paint. In a number of locations where infrastructure includes large areas of vertical concrete surfaces, Council simply covers the area with a painted finish in a colour that is 'unattractive' to graffiti vandals. Any graffiti that subsequently appears is painted over in the same colour, eliminating the patchwork effect that results from using non-matching paint colours. Council has trialled the use of protective coatings on some public facilities but has found them to be of only limited value in that the coatings still require significant effort to remove the graffiti and may need to be re-applied over time at considerable cost.

In order to seek more information on the causes of graffiti vandalism and the most effective method of addressing the problem, Council received a briefing from officers of Bankstown City Council (BCC) in 2005. That briefing provided valuable information to both Councillors and senior staff on issues such as graffiti culture and popular strategies to control the problem. It also outlined a 'Nine Step Strategy' which was aimed at a long term reduction of the graffiti culture within the BCC area.

Although the amount of graffiti within THSC area is not as extensive as the level experienced by BCC, Council staff have been implementing all relevant elements of the 'Nine Step Strategy' since that briefing. Of particular importance has been the identification of what are generally remote sites where graffiti 'pieces' are most likely to be found. Once those sites have been identified, the pieces are immediately removed and the sites revisited on a regular basis until the graffiti vandals lose interest in that particular location. As a result of that strategy, it is now fairly rare to find a graffiti 'piece' on Council owned public infrastructure.

Perhaps the most significant area of concern to Council is the apparent indifference of public utility authority or State Government departments to the removal of graffiti from their infrastructure. Throughout THSC area there are numerous examples of such infrastructure covered in all forms of graffiti with no evidence of any ongoing program by those authorities or Departments to remove the graffiti. This not only contributes to a reduction in the amenity of an area but reduces the impact of Council's efforts to control graffiti on its infrastructure.

Recent legislative changes made by the State Government to control graffiti including increased penalties are of course most welcome and were actively promoted by delegates from THSC at the 2009 Local Government Association State Conference. Only time will tell whether the judicial system in particular has taken advantage of those new penalty provisions to give a strong message that the community will not tolerate graffiti vandalism.

Once again I thank you for considering Council's submission. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact the Manager – Operations Mr Michael Lathlean on 9843 0205.

Yours faithfully



Dave Walker  
**GENERAL MANAGER**