

**Submission to the Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Public Works**

**SUBMISSION ON THE EFFECTS OF GRAFFITI VANDALISM IN
ARMIDALE**

Armidale Dumaresq Council prides itself on the beauty of the city and surrounding rural areas. As such, concerted efforts are made to ensure that graffiti vandalism is minimised. The removal of Graffiti is seen as necessary to maintain that clean and well kept image that adds to the attractiveness of the City.

Armidale Dumaresq Council understands that a city with Graffiti provides the impression that nobody cares and only serves to further promulgate crime and anti-social behaviour.

The current practice of Council staff is to remove graffiti vandalism as soon as detected. Particularly graffiti vandalism that is obscene, depicts violence, hatred, contains obscenities or is considered sexual or racial vilification. This type of graffiti is removed in any case, within 24 hours of detection. Other graffiti vandalism further from the city centre may not be detected for a number of days.

It is believed that this practice has enabled Council to keep on top of the problem by preventing the spread of graffiti as the offenders/vandals do not get the gratification that they seek from their peers who will add to what has been placed there. However, whilst Council maintains their own assets, it is recognised that some private owners, other utility providers and other agencies may not possess the resources or skills to undertake effective graffiti removal. Checking, for and removal of graffiti should be part of a daily routine for property owners and managers and in particular State Agency owned property.

Armidale Dumaresq Council has recently formulated a Graffiti Management Plan (enclosed) in response to growing concerns and increasing incidents of graffiti throughout the city. The plan recognises that graffiti vandalism is a Community problem and must be tackled by the Community as a whole.

The plan seeks to engage the Community in using rapid removal techniques as well as other methods of preventing and minimising opportunities for graffiti vandalism.

Social and Economic Impact

The Graffiti Management Plan included research from overseas as well as Australian state and local government management models. This research showed that Communities that have high rates of graffiti (that is left in place) can suffer loss of business investment, jobs and Community harmony. Graffiti causes increased distrust between older generations and youth. Some Community members develop a fear of youth particularly groups of youth as the Graffiti culture is seen as gang related.

Policies and Practices

Armidale Dumaresq Council has modeled their Graffiti Management Plan on best practice suggested by the NSW Government Attorney Generals Department to support the legislation and the NSW Police in apprehending offenders.

Mural Painting Programmes

Council has used mural painting programmes as a diversionary tactic and it seems to have some effect. Areas that have been treated in this manner remain largely untouched. One mural was in place for 8 years before being vandalised.

Other diversionary programmes such as free graffiti walls have not been tried in Armidale. Following an examination of free graffiti walls at a neighbouring Council, it was not recommended as a strategy in the Graffiti Management Plan, due to a number of reasons such as,

- The provision of a free graffiti wall does not support the purpose Graffiti Control legislation
- It makes it problematic for the police to deal with offenders
- Graffiti grows beyond the limits of the free graffiti wall onto other assets and private property
- The control of material placed on a free graffiti wall is problematic
- The graffiti wall can also foster an environment of hostility and violence within the graffiti culture participants (a hierarchy of vandals competing for space).
- Free graffiti walls encourages congregations of those often under the influence of drugs and alcohol, causing a community safety concern.

Council staffs are currently working on a Public Art Policy that will support the Graffiti Management Plan. The policy will identify spaces and artists through a approval process.

Graffiti resistant finishes

All new infrastructure is designed and developed to minimise the opportunities for vandalism. The use of stainless steel in public toilets, graffiti coatings and also irregular surfaces are strategies that are employed.

Other issues.

Armidale Dumaresq Council also utilises the assistance of CCTV to identify offenders in the hope that prosecution may result from a graffiti attack.

As previously mentioned, Council maintains assets owned or controlled by them and rapidly removes graffiti that is detected or reported. The Graffiti Control Act 2008 Part 4 Sect 12 and 13 permits the removal of offensive graffiti from private property without consent under certain conditions. Those conditions stipulate that the removal

must be carried out from a public place and require the Council to bear the cost of graffiti removal.

Whilst many larger cities may be in a financial position to undertake and absorb the costs, smaller regional and local Councils are not that fortunate and rely on the goodwill of the property owner and their resources to eliminate the graffiti.

Perhaps the Government could amend this Part of the Graffiti Control Act to empower Councils to issue an order to a property owner to remove graffiti so that the entire Community does not have to suffer this visual pollution.

Through the development of Armidale Dumaresq Councils Graffiti Management Plan it was recognized that there are segments of the community that oppose the approach recommended by state and local government in regards to the distinctions between vandalism and art. There are those who will attempt to soften or excuse graffiti by calling it art. The NSW Government website clearly defines graffiti as “vandalism” when it is placed on a property without the consent of the owner.

In this case, the media can play an important role when reporting gross acts of graffiti vandalism by emphasising that it is vandalism and refrain from using the word “art”.