



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2011-2012

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

Local Government, the North Coast

Thursday 27 October 2011

Answers to be lodged by: 22 November 2011

Budget Estimates Secretariat
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Hearing date	Portfolio	Answer to be lodged by
27 October 2011	Local Government, the North Coast	22 November 2011 [21 days]

Questions relating to the portfolio of Local Government

27 OCTOBER 2011, 2.00 pm – 2.45 pm

Questions from the Hon Amanda Fazio MLC

Elections

1. Re: Division of Local Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet: Guidelines for Council Administered Elections 2012, what is the average difference in cost between a council administering its own elections and appointing the NSWEC?
2. Has any funding been made available to councils to assist with running their election next year?
3. If the council wishes to continue using the NSWEC it now must pass a resolution before November 30, 2011 (at least a year before the election). Therefore, is the process of appointing an independent administrator now more difficult and time-consuming?
4. How many councils have so far applied to continue using the NSWEC?
 - a. Which councils?
5. How is the independence and objectivity of the General Manager running the elections assured?
6. Has the Division of Local Government sought advice from ICAC?
7. Are there any programs being developed to train councillors and staff about their new responsibilities (that historically had been the duty of the NSWEC), since the changes to the conduct of elections require increased knowledge and understanding about processes and current elections legislative requirements? Is there an extra cost in terms of training/hiring?
8. Under the amendment "councils will be able to negotiate on commercial terms how their elections will be administered". What is meant here by commercial terms?
9. Under the act there are provisions for allegations of maladministration to be reviewed by the Division. Reviewing possible maladministration internally within the division seems problematic?
10. Are there mechanisms or other bodies that would review concerns?

Destination 2036

11. Why was this conference, which was advertised as a workshop, held before many local Mayoral elections occurred in September which a number of councillors lost their Mayoral positions?
12. Can the Minister advise, why you didn't arrange the O'Farrell taxpayer funded Destinations Conference to coincide with the LGA conference?
13. Can the Minister advise the consultations you or your department have had with the proposed changes to the status of councils and employment protection provisions of the Local Government Amendment Bill 2011.
14. Can the Minister advise what evidence was used to support your proposed changes to the status of councils and employment protections?
15. Can the Minister provide an updated costing of the O'Farrell funded Destinations Conference?

16. Why is the government devising plans for local government for the next 25 years without any contributions from the people who work in local government, pensioner, ratepayer and community groups?
17. Can the Minister advise for what length of time did Professor Sohail Inayatullah, and Ms Corin Moffat speak at the conference?

Swimming Pools

18. What funding will be provided to assist councils in conducting swimming pool safety campaigns?
19. Has there been any mention of pool owners being required to obtain an annual certificate of compliance from their local council?

Dogs

- a. In Victoria a "dangerous dog" hotline was recently established in order for people to report dogs they believe to be restricted (and therefore illegally kept). On the first day of its operation, the hotline received 122 calls. Are there similar initiatives being considered in NSW?
 - b. According to NSW BP No.3 2011-12, pg (7-11) reported dog attacks are forecast at 5,000, what funding will the government provide to local councils to reduce the number of dog attacks?
21. In BP 3 (7-5)
 - a. Please provide details about Councils which are applying for the \$3.5Million Local government Infrastructure Backlog policy?

In BP 3 (7-8)

- a. Titled Future Directions
- b. Review of the Local Government Act 1993, The government made an announcement in June that a review will be conducted, when will this review take place, who will conduct the review?

Pensioner Rebate Scheme

- a. Inflation is at 3.7%, local council rates are rising, pensioners are struggling to make ends meet.
- b. Will you tie the State Government's portion of the pensioner rebate scheme to inflation to help pensioners meet the cost of their Local Council rates?
- c. Minister, for all those hardworking self funded retirees whose income has been slashed by the instability of the markets and GFC, are struggling to pay their local council rates
- d. Will you extend the rebate scheme to assist them in this time of financial hardship?

Rates

- a. Can the Minister rule out appropriating rates for state infrastructure projects?

Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme

- a. Can you provide details how the scheme will work?
- b. Can the Minister advise who will sit on the assessment panel?
- c. What are the eligibility criteria?
- d. What defines significant or most critical infrastructure?
- e. When will the scheme come into operation?
- f. What assumptions were made in the modelling done by the government to support the statement that \$70million provided for the interest subsidy scheme will release \$1 billion in infrastructure?
- g. What prudential regulations have you made?
- h. Who will manage the borrowing risk?
- i. What is the risk to the ratepayer?
- j. Will the government underwrite the risk if the council doesn't have the capacity to pay the principal or half the interest?
- k. Will treasury be represented on the assessment panel?
- l. By what mechanism will councils access borrowings of \$1billion dollars to upgrade facilities?

26. The Local Government's Minister's press release on Wednesday 3 August, 2011 stated the Minister made special visits to the North Coast and across Sydney.
- Since being appointed can the Minister advise which Councils or Shires he visited on the North Coast or visited a school etc) and:
 - What topics were discussed?
 - Who did he meet?
 - Which councils did he visit across Sydney?
 - What topics were discussed?
 - Outline the list of councils he stated he will visit in his media release?
 - Has the Minister met with any Local Government workers?
 - Does the Minister support a 2.5% wage cap for local government employees?
 - Does the Minister support corporatisation of Local Councils?
27. Phones
- How many blackberries does DPC assign to your Ministerial staff and to whom have they been issued?
 - How many iPads does DPC assign to your Ministerial office and to whom have they been issued?
 - How many iPads have you purchased for your office and to whom have they been issued?
 - How many iPhones does DPC assign to your Ministerial office and to whom have they been issued?
 - How many iPhones have you purchased for your office and to whom have they been issued?
 - For each phone or device, how much was each bill from April to October?
 - How many have phones or devices have been lost in your office?
 - What is the cost of replacing those phones or devices?
28. Media and Public Relations
- How many media or public relations advisers are employed for each of your portfolio agencies?
 - What is the forecast for 2011-12 for the number of media or public relations advisers to be employed and their total cost?
 - How many media or public relations advisers are employed in your ministerial office?
29. Overseas Trips
- Have any of your overseas trips in the past year been paid for in part or in full by using public money?
 - If so, did any of your relatives or friends accompany you on these trips?
30. Office Costs
- What is the annual remuneration package for your chief of staff?
 - What is the annual remuneration package for your head media advisor?
 - What is the annual remuneration package for each of your staff?
 - What is the estimated expenditure for your office budget in 2011-12?
 - Have any office renovations or fit outs been undertaken in your ministerial office since April?
 - If so, could you give details of contracted costs?
 - What is your office budget?
 - How many political advisors are in your office?
 - How many administration staff?
 - How many Department Liaison officers are assigned to your office?
 - How many staff in the Department are assigned to Ministerial support duties?
31. Cabcharge
- In terms of your ministerial office, how much did your office spend on taxi fares, including Cabcharge since April?
32. Restructure
- Are any of your portfolio agencies undergoing a restructure?
 - How many jobs are expected to be cut as a result of that restructure?

- c. How many people are expected to have their wages cut as a result of that restructure?
 - d. How many voluntary redundancies are expected to be offered as a result of that restructure?
33. Agency Costs
- a. What is your agency's catering budget?
 - b. Since April, has the agency changed its branding?
 - c. How much was spent on rebranding the agency?
 - d. How much has been spent on stationary?
34. Correspondence
- a. How long is the average turnaround for responding to correspondence in your agency?
 - b. How many pieces of correspondence have been outstanding for more than 60 days?
35. Paying bills on time
- a. Since April, on how many occasions has the agency not paid a supplier or contractor for more than 30 days?
 - b. How many bills have been outstanding for longer than that period?
36. Grants to non-government organisations
- a. Does your department provide recurrent grant funds to non-government organisations?
 - b. If yes,
 - i. What are the names of all organisations in receipt of funding?
 - ii. What is the total amount of funding received by each organisation, including goods and services tax?
 - iii. On what date was the funding advanced?
 - iv. What was the purpose for each grant or funding advance?
 - v. Was any funding withheld or returned?
 - vii. If so, what were the reasons for withholding or requiring the funding to be returned?
 - viii. What is the indexation rate applied to non recurrent grant funds in 2011/2012?
37. Feasibility studies, audits, taskforces or reviews
- a. Is your department currently undertaking any feasibility studies, audits, taskforces or reviews,
 - b. If so;
 - i. What are the terms of reference or details of each study, audit, taskforce or review?
 - ii. Who is conducting the study, audit, taskforce or review?
 - iii. Was each study, audit, taskforce or review publicly advertised seeking expression of interest or competitive tenders?
 - iv. Is there a contract in place detailing terms of engagement for the study, audit, taskforce or review?
 - v. What is the timeline of each study, audit, taskforce or review?
 - vi. What are the details of any costs involved in each study, audit, taskforce or review?

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**There were no additional questions on notice lodged by members relating to the portfolio of
Local Government.**

Questions relating to the portfolio of the North Coast

27 OCTOBER 2011, 2.45 pm – 3.30 pm

Questions from the Hon Jan Barham MLC

38. Can the minister provide:
 - a. an update on the Broadwater and Condong cogeneration plants,
 - b. information on the financial investment the State has made to these plants,
 - c. advice on what Federal Government investment was provided and
 - d. what is the future of camphor laurel fuel for the plants?
39. Considering the high level of housing unaffordability on the north coast, are there any plans for an increase in social housing stock?
40. What position is the government taking on state planning process like the West Byron development and why isn't this particular project being referred back to the council for determination, in light of the coalition's position on returning planning powers?
41. Can the minister advise on community concerns regarding crown land management on the north coast and in particular recent moves to compulsory acquire council owned lands at Brunswick for commercial purposes?
42. Can the Minister provide an update on cross border relationships with Queensland. For example, what, if any, discussions have been had between The Bligh and O'Farrell Governments about issues particular to this region?
43. Are there plans to require councils to develop and implement water demand management plans to avoid the construction of new dams?
44. Are there any specific plans for job creation opportunities on the North Coast ?
45. Can the minister advise what budget has been allocated for Forest NSW's defence in court proceedings taken by the Office of Environment and Heritage in response to alleged breaches of threatened species licence prescriptions at Doubleduke State Forest?
46. Can the minister advise on any initiatives to support the creative sector on the north coast and in particular any funding for job creation as a result of the Regional Creative Industries Strategy

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There were no additional questions on notice lodged by members relating to the portfolio of the North Coast.