

## **INQUIRY INTO SKILLS SHORTAGES IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW**

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**Theme:**

**Summary**



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COUNCIL REFERENCE: 30141 AM  
COUNCIL FOLIO NO: D05/66314  
CONTACT PERSON: Stephen Crerar

5th August, 2005

The Director  
Standing Committee on State Development  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

**Skills Shortages Inquire Submission**

The Mayor has referred to me your letter of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2005 inviting Council to participate in the Committee's Inquiry into Skills Shortages in Rural and Regional NSW.

Please find below details surrounding various positions Council is suffering hardship in recruiting due to the current skills shortages:

**(a) Engineers**

Council's business unit Shoalhaven Water has had difficulty in attracting and recruiting Civil Engineers to work in water and sewerage operations. Since 1999, Shoalhaven Water has attempted to fill five vacancies for positions of professional water and sewerage engineers. In order to fill these vacancies Council has on average advertised twice in the national press and accompanying Internet job boards. In most situations there have been a reasonable number of applicants. However, a large proportion of these applicants have not met the entry level qualifications. Council has advertised for these positions with an entry level qualification requiring a *degree in Civil Engineering or Combined Civil and Environmental Engineering degree, permitting admission to the Institution of Engineers Australia, as at least a graduate member.*

Difficulties have occurred where the pool of applicants are qualified in Environmental Engineering and do not possess a combined degree. On advice from the Institution of Engineers, Council asks applicants invited to interview to bring their academic transcripts to assess whether the applicants have studied enough structural engineering subjects to perform the inherent requirements of the positions. This is very difficult where applicants have overseas qualifications and potentially puts Council at risk of a subjective judgement outside of the skill of the selection committee.

Shoalhaven Water, like Council, faces the challenges of an ageing workforce with low staff attrition rates. Given the ageing of the workforce (particularly at management level), it is expected there will be a skills shortage in professional engineering/management positions being experienced over the next five to ten years.

#### **(b) Planners**

Council has tried to recruit experienced planners (with 5 years or more experience) and were unsuccessful in attracting applications. Council subsequently advertised for near or new graduates without experience as a prerequisite, for a fixed term of 2 years. Council has also tried a tiered advertisement for a Strategic Planner where depended on the applicants experience would determine whether they were employed as a Senior Strategic Planner or as a Strategic Planner.

There are a number of strategies Council considers could be utilised to help attract candidates for Planner positions. These include:

- Increase public awareness of planning and its image to the community. This means promoting planning as a desirable career. People who have not yet made a career choice or are considering a change in career need to be aware of the rewards that can be gained from planning, and the diversity of fields it can cover.
- There should be greater flexibility in the qualifications necessary for employment and admission to the Planners Institute of Australia (PIA). Many employers require admission to PIA as a corporate member as a prerequisite of employment, despite the duties involved. To achieve corporate membership of PIA, it is necessary to be awarded a recognised qualification and gain experience in specified fields. It is understood the only courses now offered in NSW are either a degree course or a postgraduate course.
- Without a commitment by industry to assist in ensuring there is a pool of planners available to itself or the community through a traineeship or the like, there is likely to be an ongoing lack of supply to meet the demand for planners. It would appear a commitment by industry representatives to support the entry of new planners into the profession through training (whether by offering a cadetship or traineeship etc.) is lacking. It also appears some organizations prefer to employ qualified and experienced planners to meet an immediate requirement rather than undertaking the costly and responsible task of training.

#### **(c) Other Strategies**

Council has also employed other strategies to assist in attracting suitable candidates for professional positions including:

- Reviewing the market and including an additional salary component to attract good applicants
- The offer of a leaseback motor vehicle as an added benefit
- Varying job descriptions to lessen the experience required to perform a role and to focus more on the skills and qualification levels

- Council has also initiated a performance bonus system whereby Planners have the opportunity to be given a salary bonus based on a review of their performance over a three (3) month period
- Council has introduced a new Flexible Working Hours Policy to recognise diversity and allow family friendly arrangements to retain staff e.g variations to start and finish times, availability of 9 day fortnight, availability of working from home
- Revised the studies assistance policy to promote employees furthering their education and providing financial assistance
- Council is also undertaking a review the removal and relocation expenses policy to provide greater financial assistance for employees moving to the Shoalhaven
- Council is implementing a recognition of service policy to reward outstanding performance and to recognise long term service to council

Council is also a member of the Southern Councils Group (SCG), formerly the Illawarra Region of Councils, which is an organisation representing Local Government in the Illawarra and South Coast regions. The SCG will be making a separate submission to the Committee expressly addressing current and future demands for labour across the region and the economic and social impact of the skills shortage.

If you need further information about this matter, please contact Stephen Crerar, Human Resources Manager on (02) 4429 3560. Please quote Council's reference 30141.

Yours faithfully



Stephen Crerar

**Human Resources Manager**