

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS

Organisation: Bega Valley Shire Council

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PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 – CUSTOMER SERVICE

Inquiry into public toilets

TERMS OF REFERENCE

That Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service inquire into and report on public toilets, and in particular:

(a) the provision, design, accessibility and inclusivity of public toilets across New South Wales, including toilets provided in public places and toilets provided for the use of members of the public in private premises accessed by the public,

Bega Valley Shire Council understands the importance of toilets to the public in our towns, villages, and natural spaces. However historically a number of these assets either built by council or volunteer groups have been built in isolation in regard to aspects such as design, accessibility, maintenance, and the proximity to existing facilities.

Across the Bega Valley Shire there are toilets of different shapes, sizes, accessibility, materials, and maintenance requirements. We also have one of the highest per capita provision of Council managed public toilets across the state. A number of our toilets are outdated and have a limited ability to be updated in response to changing design standards, community needs and expectations.

A significant ongoing financial investment is needed to renew and upgrade aging facilities. A clear provision framework and design guidelines would assist and provide much improved consistency throughout the state.

A holistic lifecycle framework would enable councils to manage toilets in a more coordinated network arrangement which reaches across local government boundaries.

(b) state, national and international best practice for the provision and maintenance of public toilets,

Over the last few years the NSW government have released guides for areas including walkable open spaces, playgrounds and adventurous spaces. A similar guide that prioritises principles of planning, design, construction, maintenance and renewal of public toilets will go a long way to not only help leverage the necessary funding, but importantly provide consistency in service levels and provision of toilet facilities in public spaces.

Poor toilet facilities can be a major barrier to people using public spaces. Well designed, accessible and clean public toilets go much further than just providing convenience. For



many on our communities they are often the foundation for how inclusive, accessible and useable a public space is.

(c) the regulation of, and funding for, public toilets in New South Wales and whether new standards, guidelines, funding models, legislation or other forms of regulation are warranted,

As a regional council with variety of geographical locations we have some unique challenges. The Bega Valley region is also serviced by toilets managed by the following NSW government organisations:

- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Transport for NSW
- Forestry Corporation

Given the importance of public toilets, legislation or other forms of regulation could be an important trigger for additional investment by local government. Any investment by local government to comply with legislation or regulation would also require a significant contribution from state and federal counterparts.

The ability to refer to and work within a series of parameters that is consistent across the state for a range of agencies but also has enough flexibility to allow for the unique challenges would be advantageous. Implementing a guide that provides information for the planning (provision), designing, construction, maintenance and renewal is required.

(d) the employment arrangements and conditions of cleaners who clean public toilets in both public and private premises; and

Currently BVSC toilets are cleaned by BVSC employees. There are not plans to change this arrangement. However, there are challenges including the travel cost of managing facilities across a large shire area and the lack of practical & cost-effective options to open and then lock facilities (for use in day light hrs) due to standard working hrs and requirements under the award. These issues can lead to other problems such as vandalism and unchecked prohibited camping.

(e) any other related matters.

1. The Bega Valley Shire has a very high population increase during summer holiday periods. Having suitable provision over busy periods while not over provision for most of the year (leading to increased asset management and depreciation costs) is a challenge.

2. Uni-sex facilities. Our current designs often include unisex individual (personal) cubicles that have high levels of passive surveillance. The reasons are:

- To reduce screened / enclosed 'common (multi person) areas.



- Increase passive surveillance
- To not limit user options for facilities.
- Considered more useable for all genders.
- Can reduce building footprint and cost.
- Unisex has been commonly used for accessible facilities for many years. (eg person and their carer may be different genders).

3. Design elements to reduce the opportunities and occurrence of vandalism. Greater guidance on the importance of toilet location that considers aspects such as passive surveillance and the use of CCTV on building facades or appropriate spaces.