Shoalhaven City Council
Forum on Council and CCB Relations
March 23 2013

OVERVIEW OF PROCEEDINGS

Prepared by
Dr Danny Wiggins
Facilitator

Introduction

The Forum was attended by 52 participants, representing the Community Consultative Bodies (CCBs), Councillors and Council staff. A full list of participants at the Workshop is included at **Attachment 1** to this Overview.

Proceedings commenced with a welcome from the Mayor of the Shoalhaven, Councillor Joanna Gash. The key points raised in the Mayor's introduction were that:

- the Council wants to hear from and work with the CCBs
- we all want reassurance that the CCBs aim to be truly representative of their local communities
- we should aim to build confidence and trust in the CCBs, with more autonomy for their operations.

The facilitator noted that the aim of the Forum was to discuss the relationship between CCBs and Councillors/ staff and, more specifically, that the objectives were to:

- hear the views of the CCBs (by formal presentation and general discussion).
- focus on the means of forging a more strategic, useful and productive relationship: a better synergy.
- provide the opportunity for all participants to comment (including a panel of the speakers and Council).

Proceedings followed a pre-set program, a copy of which is provided at **Attachment 2.**

Formal presentations

Three speakers set the scene with formal presentations:

Peter Hudson OAM (Environmental Coordinator, Read Head Villages Association Inc.) described the CCBs as a 'wasted resource', that had produced 'some strong efforts despite Council - a sad reflection'. He promoted a relationship of 'ongoing maturing partners', and the CCBs as 'one of the best ways of relaying Council intentions'. He cited the Shoalhaven Local Environmental Plan (SLEP) Review as a positive, and the recent skate park experience as a negative example of the current relationship. In addition, Peter raised a number of specific positive actions for both the Council and the CCBs (see table below).

Jessica Zealand (Secretary, Shoalhaven Heads CCB) thought that there needed to be a 'change in the perception of our effectiveness', to encourage locals not to bypass the CCB (in going directly to Council). Making CCBs 'truly representative was the biggest challenge'. Jessica's key issues and specific actions are also included in the table below.

Graeme Gibson (Huskisson Woollamia Community Voice) reiterated the need for trust and respect, and promoted the role of 'participatory local democracy' as contributing to community well- being. What was necessary was for Council and the community to work together in partnership, with a 'transformative approach - not tinkering at the edges'. Details on the principles of such an approach (and Graeme's specific suggested actions) are also shown below.

With the benefit of Summary Sheets provided by the three speakers, the facilitator provided the following two 'displays' summarising the key points raised (as a prompt for further discussion). The title of Display No.1 is drawn from Peter Hudson's 'key concepts', the three key issues (a – c) from Jessica Zealand's presentation, and the actions (Council and CCBs) from all three speakers. 'Improved participation models' (Display No.2) is drawn from Graeme Gibson's presentation.

Display No.1   Council-CCB Relations: growing trust, building synergy, gaining respect

a)   Improving communication both ways

Council	CCBs
• notify CCBs first: - local infrastructure - staff visits - individual ratepayer/ resident requests (with community-wide	• build personal relations with Council (Ward) and staff

implications)	
• seek CCB input (as a community focal point) early: - community wide issues - City-wide infrastructure - CCB to attend and participate in discussions	• provide options as well as opinion
• read and note input from CCBs	
• reconsider time period(s) for consultation	
• provide prompt responses (plus contact person)	• provide prompt response (interest? Y/N)
• allow discussions at presentations	• improve internal communication (email)

b)   **Understanding community needs and recognising stakeholders**

Council	CCBs
• make Community Directory available	• get to know their community and issues (surveys?) • work on distribution lists • target specific groups

c)   **CCBs as representative: gaining credibility**

Council	CCBs
• (annual) CCB month • consider alternative participation models eg. citizen panels.	• discover reasons for despondency • CCBs to report on initiatives to increase involvement • improve operations

Display No.2   Improved Participation Models

- Some areas not covered by CCBs: should be all areas.
- A name change for CCBs?
- Investigate models used at other Councils (eg. North Sydney)
- A more 'transformative approach': collaborative relationship; a long distance journey.
- Graeme's principles for such an approach:
  - Community wellbeing
  - Community Engagement Policy
  - Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower
  - Innovate, innovate, innovate
  - Address known barriers
  - CCB role beyond group
  - Community leadership.

A full copy of the speakers' Summary Sheets (the basis of the two Displays) is provided at **Attachment 3**.

General discussion

The Speakers formed a Panel to respond to the general discussion; they were joined by Councillor Patricia White, representing the Council.

Before and after the refreshment break (and prompted by the facilitator's summary of the presentations), questions (Q) and comments (C) from the audience were noted:

C: Support for the criticism of problems with Council's communication eg. some emails are not acknowledged, some notices are out of date!

What is needed is an in-house Council 'Liaison Officer', to deal directly with the CCBs. Acknowledgement of correspondence and a contact officer should be provided. Timing should be addressed.

At this point the Mayor advised that such a position would be created as a member of the proposed Media and Communications Unit, part of the Council's proposed restructure. While this was greeted positively, it was suggested that there should have been consultation on the suggestion!

C: A number of comments/ questions were noted in relation to the Liaison Officer:
- Is one enough? One per Ward?
- Some felt that the position should be responsible for the whole community, not just CCBs (as per the Community Engagement Policy).

- It was stressed that the role was 'not to do the work of the CCBs' Staff workload is an issue.
- The Liaison Officer should report to the General Manager.

C: A key issue was the lack of representation at CCBs from 20-40 year olds and youngsters; seen not as a lack of interest but as reflecting the existing demands on the working age/young parent group. Perhaps other activities (eg. music events) and better timing would help. This should be addressed by the CCB Joint Meeting.

C: Not enough time is provided for CCBs to make submissions. Time cycles should be reconsidered eg. to coincide with locals newsletters (eg. Berry). It would also help if Council provided professional (staff) advice/ briefings on some proposals.

Q: Can the five minute time limit for comments at Council meetings be extended?

A: Needs investigation.

C: Some locals are guarded about email access (for sending invitations and minutes). Council's website could be used as a portal for such information, be interactive and ongoing (eg. continuous 'threads'). Current web-access for CCBs is poor. This could be a task for the new Liaison Officer.

C: In general terms, evidence, in writing, should be provided to confirm Council's commitments.

C: Concern about the 'culture' of Council staff, eg. on implementing the 'groundbreaking' Community Engagement Policy. There should be 'cooperation all the way down the line'.

Q: What is the attitude of staff and Councillors? Mistrust?

A: The General Manager indicated that the CCBs were a 'great network back into the community' and vice-versa (the audience added). Existing and proposed initiatives are supported:

- Combined CCB Executive Meetings.
- Assigning Councillors to certain CCBs.
- The Liaison Officer position (as 'genuine support').
- CCB meeting times included in Councillors' electronic diaries.

C: Congratulations to the General Manager.

A: 'Most important' and 'extremely valuable' for some Councillors, even though some CCB responses have not been successful.

C: CCBs can help Council, with their 'community speak': in addressing issues and adopting a collaborative approach.

C: Current two-way communication 'bogged down in bureaucracy'.

C: Consideration should be given to a 'day of consultation' for CCBs, prior to relevant Council Committee meetings.

C: Councillors as well as staff could meet on-site, when prompted.

Staff noted that Councillors were currently engaged in a series of bus tours.

C: The Mayor could provide a 'Mayoral Monthly' column on CCBs.

C: A CCB Standing (or 'Sitting') Committee could be formed to assist in 'growing the relationship' eg. fleshing out the Liaison Officer role, investigating university resources.

Some felt quite strongly that this was 'another layer of bureaucracy' and that there were already the joint meetings.

It was suggested that task-specific Working Groups was a better idea. The SLEP Group was a very good example: showcasing local talent. This Group's efforts needs to be recognised by Council.

C: The onus was on CCBs to show how they have pursued membership, etc. This would help in maintaining Council respect.

C: The onus should be on Councillors to engage with CCBs

C: CCBs should utilise social media as a way to attract younger locals (and those with holiday homes). The suggested portal on Council's website would help.The Callala Bay experience is working very well.

C: Training for CCBs on social media would assist.

C: The CCBs are 'issue-driven', while Council is 'policy-driven' (with various types of plans). What is needed is a 'road map' describing in simple terms how the various plans and policies (and work programs) fit together and are prioritised. As an education tool, it would greatly assist CCBs (and the Liaison Officer). Also, CCBs should note the significance of the Community Strategic Plan.

C: The Shoalhaven Heads Strategic Plan (and survey work) is an example of a community initiated strategy.

Where to from here?

The facilitator advised that the next step was for him to produce an Overview of Proceedings that would be circulated to all those present and to all CCBs. This should be an Agenda item at an up-coming CCB meeting, with coordinated feedback to the Liaison Officer.

The Mayor, in thanking participants, reiterated her three key points, that:

- communication was a big issue for her and the Council
- councillors were encouraged to adopt a whole-of-Council role at CCBs (not simply ward-based).
- CCBs should be the focus for other Community groups.

The General Manager suggested that an action plan, based on the outcomes of the forum, should be produced. He also stressed the need for responding in a 'doable-fashion' (time and resources), especially given Council's pressing program - restructure/ transformation.

Final comments from the audience reiterated that the CCBs:

- need to communicate with each other
- should educate themselves - on the proposed road map and on utilising social media.

The Forum concluded at approximately 12:20pm, with a light luncheon.

Attachment 1

CCB FORUM

Saturday 23rd March 2013

Name	Representing
Joanna Gash	Mayor – Shoalhaven City Council
Allan Baptist	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
Amanda Findley	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
Andrew Guile	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
Lynnette Kearney	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
Clive Robertson	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
Jemma Tribe	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
Greg Watson	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
John Wells	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
Patricia White	Councillor – Shoalhaven City Council
David Reynolds	Basin Villages Forum
Christine Rigg	Basin Villages Forum
Shason Adlem	Bawley Point/Kioloa Community Association
Mariah Beckett	Bawley Point/Kioloa Community Association
Will Armitage	Berry Alliance
Rick Gainford	Berry Alliance
Rae D Jameson	Budgong Community Group
Ken Stewart	Budgong Community Group
Howard Duncan	Callala Bay Community Association
Bill Hughes	Callala Bay Community Association
Greg Westlake	Callala Beach Progress Association

Richard Booth	Cambewarra Residents & Ratepayers Association
Gale Stebbings	Cambewarra Residents & Ratepayers Association
Sue Ferguson	Conjola District Landcare Association
David Wilson	Conjola District Lakecare Association
Robert Shimmen	Culburra Beach Progress Association
Ray Sutton	Culburra Beach Progress Association
Peter Cumes	Currarong Progress Association
Jem Horwood	Friends of 2538
Ron Vaughan	Get to the Point Program (Greenwell Point)
David White	Get to the Point Program (Greenwell Point)
Graeme Gibson	Huskisson & Woollamia Community Voice
Steven Murphy	Huskisson & Woollamia Community Voice
Garry Kelson	Huskisson & Woollamia Community Voice
John Castellan	Orient Point Progress Association
Peter Hudson	Red Head Villagers Association
Jennifer Whitmarsh	Red Head Villagers Association
Jessica Zealand	Shoalhaven Heads Community Forum
Heather Dunnett	Sussex Inlet Community Forum
Gwen Wiggins	Sussex Inlet Community Forum
Peter Allison	Tomerong Community Forum
John Levett	Tomerong Community Forum
Sunnee Ord	Ulladulla & Districts Community Forum
Bob Claril	Vincentia Ratepayers & Residents Association
Liz Tooley	Vincentia Ratepayers & Residents Association

The following Council staff were also in attendance:
Russ Pigg – General Manager
Rob Donaldson – Assistant General Manager

Tim Fletcher – Director Development & Environmental Services Group
Peter Dun – Director Finance and Services
Cliff Harris – Acting Director City Services and Operations
Bill Little – Building Manager/Finance & Corporate Services Group
Julia Rodgers – Project Compliance Officer/Shoalhaven Water
Bob Goldspring – Building Section Manager/Development & Environmental Services Group
Jessica Rippon – Senior Strategic Planner/Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Group

Shoalhaven City Council
Forum: Council and CCB relations
Saturday March 23 2013

PROGRAM

9.00am	Introduction	D. Wiggins
	Welcome address	Mayor
	Objectives and Program	D. Wiggins
9.30am	Improving relations between	
	Council and CCBs	P. Hudson
	• current problems	J. Zealand
	• possible solutions	G. Gibson

10.30am	Refreshment break	

10.45pm	General Discussion	
	• Other comments, questions and suggestions	Audience
	• Panel response	Panellists
12.00pm	Where to from here?	D. Wiggins
		R. Pigg
12.30pm	Close/ Light lunch	

Peter Hudson CCB and Council Workshop
23 March 2013

CONCEPT	HOW?
Growing TRUST	- CCBs notified first about council local infrastructure initiatives - CCBs to communicate with (Ward) Councillors more often about upcoming local community issues - Councillors to seek input from CCBs on community wide issues - Council utilise CCB inputs as focal points for community wide issues (eg SLEP) - CCBs encouraged to attend and participate in initial planning work for major city wide projects (SLEP, citywide DCPs) - CCBs to show (at least annually) what initiatives have been undertaken to encourage or improve local community involvement in the CCB
Building SYNERGY	- Individual ratepayer requests to Councillors/Council encouraged to have individual ratepayer requests (if these have community implications) to be firstly channelled through the local CCB for their input - CCBs to respond to such input in a timely manner stating that they will either provide input or abstain from making comment - Council to include CCBs at

	initial phase of proposed city wide infrastructure initiatives • Council to respond more quickly to CCB letters/requests and identify the contact officer handling the matter • CCBs to provide options with all proposals/objections
Gaining RESPECT	• Presentations to various Council Committees to be afforded some discussion; Councillors nominate evidence for opposing views of the representation • Intended visits by staff/councillors to an area involving local community implications to notify local CCB to attend visit • Individual approach to Council or councillors to be channelled through CCB for their input if considered a local community issue • Council ensure that CCB input has been read and noted prior to sending form letters acknowledging (ostensible) receipt of CCB input

Jessica Zealand

Improving relationships between CCBs and Councillors/Staff.

Communities like Shoalhaven Heads are representative of a lot of village communities in the Shoalhaven with similar demographics and size.

I can only reflect from my experience as a member of the Shoalhaven Heads Executive Committee and the challenges we have had. Like most CCB's we recognised that being truly representative of the community was the challenge and canvasing input from the wider community was key to getting as wide as possible representation as possible and therefore gaining both Council and Community credibility.

We identified gaining credibility within the community was key and would be our biggest challenge. We needed to identify why certain groups within the community had become despondent to the CCB, were taking issues to Council directly and bypassing the CCB all together; essentially the CCB had become ineffective.

The main criticism of the CCB and reasons for poor attendance were due to :
- Objectives to address issues were not being reached and therefore outcomes and actions not achieved.
- Issues being raised were not relevant to wider community and held no interest.
- Lack of interesting content at meetings and the same issues being raised repeatedly.
- Time poor individuals and families already committed to other community groups and therefore the CCB meeting not being a priority.

To address this issue we reconsidered the role of the CCB and how we engaged with the community. We identified 3 key areas to regain community interest, validate the necessity of the CCB and subsequently regain credibility within the community and therefore credibility with Councils.

1. How we communicated with the Community and Council
   - Create personnel relationships. Get to know your councillors, key council staff and key community group members.
   - Develop ways for the community to participate in issues without having to attend monthly meetings.
   - Create a clear line of communication and central email and keep all executive committee members copied or included in correspondence.
   - Create community distribution lists.
   - Publicise meetings and topics for discussion and hold additional meetings when necessary to canvas a wider audience.
   - Use 'Community Directories' to distribute information and help recognise stakeholder groups.

2. Understanding community needs and recognise stakeholders.

- Identify topics / issues – find out what is important to other community groups and therefore wider community. e.g. Survey, personal networks, attend other group meeting.
- Identify main stakeholders in relation to individual issues
- Target specific community groups to gain input on issues specific to their needs.
- Target information distribution specific and relevant to individual community groups to maintain community interest.

3. Undertake active community engagement exercises - get to know your community.

- Invite the Community to contact CCB member to discuss their issues?
- Identify who are the people already active within the community?
- Meet or write to Community Groups and request groups nominate a Forum Representative report on CCB issues and vice versa
- Find out topics/issues of interest to community groups and how the CCB can assist them achieve their goals.
- Create a line of communication and ask to be copied in on correspondence with other community groups

By CCB's taking these into consideration they may change the perception of their effectiveness within the community and gain credibility with Council by actually being representative of the community via their active community engagement. Councillors and Council Staff can undertake a similar process and assist CCB's in being effective by

- Directing issues individual community members put forward back to CCB's for comment before actioning.
- Reconsider consultation periods, acknowledging Community Forums meet monthly and may require 2 months to ensure they have the opportunity to undertake community engagement.
- Give CCB's access to Community Directories and make sure directories are up to date

In conclusion both CCB's and Council reconsidering
1. **How they communicate**
2. **understanding community needs and recognising stakeholders**
3. **Undertaking active community engagement**

will give the Community reassurance that their needs are being understood and considered, give CCB's credibility as being as representative of the community

as possible and therefore provide Council with credible community engagement to action issues.

Graeme Gibson: Transforming the relationship between Shoalhaven City Council and Community Consultative Bodies

In May 2011 Shoalhaven City Council, as a staff initiative, hosted a *Local Open Government Summit*. Open Government is based on the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration. This summit was part of an international initiative, Shoalhaven was the only Australian local government authority to participate. I had been invited to make a presentation which I did on the opportunities for deliberative democracy at the local level. I subsequently published an essay on this, "Open government should start locally".[i]

It was clear that this was a one-off event with no commitment to any follow-up and I finished my presentation saying it was too important to be left to chance. I didn't know it exactly but I was giving myself a challenge to keep the concept going. This led to *GRASSROOTS: Growing Local Democracy* a public forum I organised in Nowra in September 2011. An audience of 110 citizens heard a panel of speakers with expertise in the fields of community engagement, participation and planning. Following this the citizens deliberated on the ideas they had heard. Deliberation means "careful consideration before decision" and this was evident on the night. More information, including a DVD of the forum is available.[ii]

In May 2012 I published *Beyond Fear and Loathing: Local politics at work*.[iii] While largely based on my experiences of local politics in this area from some years go it presents a "positive case for change in the way we do local democracy … with community and council working together in partnership."

Some of my ideas that followed this were captured in an essay published in July 2012, *Beyond the (local) ballot box*.[iv] This highlighted instances where local councils had taken their community seriously, engaging in that most vital aspect of councils function–the finances. These councils–and their communities– had reaped a substantial reward with high levels of satisfaction. I contrasted that with the situation in Shoalhaven which had followed an entirely different approach with predictable outcomes, still being felt today.

In February 2013, in response to SCCs annual meeting with Community Consultative Bodies I provided a short proposal outlining active steps council could take to support CCBs. This would include such simple steps as elected councillors actively and regularly encouraging participation in CCBs in whatever way possible, along with an annual CCBs month. During this month appropriate welcoming activities could be held. Awards might be presented to recognise the considerable achievements of CCBs. Greater participation within CCBs would go some way to address a concern that CCBs are not representative. There are major benefits to this proposal:

- Active participation in community life brings social, emotional and health benefits in feeling a greater connectedness.
- When people talk with each other, rather than about each other, disagreement and conflict (which are natural) are more likely to be respectfully managed.

- Increased participation in local decision-making and problem solving brings a wider range of viewpoints to the issue. Better, more representative decisions are likely.

Those suggestions are not expensive, not difficult and present no risk. While useful they are also extremely limited. In this forum, devoted to the relationship between council and CCBs I want to suggest a more transformative approach. This will rely on a collaborative relationship between elected councillors, senior council staff and CCBs.

This is a long distance journey rather than a destination. A partnership based on respect and trust will have vast benefits to communities throughout the Shoalhaven and to council. A number of principles underpin this approach and need to be recognised and explored as appropriate. These follow, in point form.

Community wellbeing is built from a foundation of participatory local democracy–based on good governance and active citizenship–with a commitment to promoting social justice and local social capital[v]

Community Engagement Policy is key
Establishes what is sought and what promise is being made by council to community. A community engagement team is needed and this should include community representation

Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower
These are the levels of public impact endorsed by SCC in its Community Engagement Policy. Collaborate is the preferred level in the Community Strategic Planning process. Collaboration supports partnership

Innovate, innovate, innovate
Embrace process innovations, not just technological wizardry. Eg. citizen's panels, enhanced role on committees and reference groups, a CCB standing committee that will do more than meet with council once a year

Address known barriers to participation
Overcoming tokenism, guarding against co-optation and addressing the balance between rights and responsibilities

CCBs have a role to play beyond their group
This includes engaging with other groups in their local community. By their nature CCBs have an holistic approach with concern for social, economic and environmental conditions–which most other groups do not

Community leadership is of utmost importance
Council should investigate the options for a community leadership development program. Leadership Onkaparinga provides an excellent starting point for investigation[vi]

Council should support the establishment of CCBs in areas currently unrepresented
And recognise that other civic groups have a legitimate right to participate

A name change is needed–CCB does not do it

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[i] This essay was published on Online Opinion, see:
http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/print.asp?article=12080
[ii] For background to the GRASSROOTS forum and media coverage see:
http://www.graeme-gibson.blogspot.com.au   A 17 minute DVD is at:
http://youtu.be/XR2HzYwh_Ps
[iii] Information about the book, including reviews and a synopsis is at:
www.beyondfearandloathing.com
[iv] This essay was published on Australian Policy Online, and is available at:
http://apo.org.au/commentary/beyond-local-ballot-box
[v] Jenny Wills, (2001) *Just Vibrant and Sustainable Communities,* Local Government
Community Services Association of Australia, Townsville
[vi] Leadership Onkaparinga is at:
http://www.onkaparingacity.com/onka/living_here/community/leadership_onkaparinga.jsp