

REPORT: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY DRAFT of SHOALHAVEN CITY COUNCIL

TO : BASIN VILLAGES FORUM, JUNE 20 2011

There are two recent Council events, which dealt with Community Engagement, of interest to our Forum. I attended both events though not as a formal Forum representative.

The first was a community seminar on 'Open Government' conducted on May 18, 2011 by Council on their development of a Community Engagement Strategy. The seminar featured their intended use of social media in engaging with the community, two talks from community members, one being an excellent keynote address by Graeme Gibson from Huskisson-Woollamia Voice and an open session, which gave a chance for spontaneous feedback from people present.

A further opportunity to witness where Council was moving was provided when a Councillors Briefing on the 'Draft Community Engagement Policy' on Tuesday May 31 was opened to and organized for community members. It was relatively well attended for a daytime event. It involved a presentation by Russ Pigg, General Manager, outlining a broad-scale background on the development of Council's position on Community Engagement. This was attended by Councillors and staff as well interested community members, many of whom were CCB members. Some Councillors worked with some of the groups, though the majority chose not to involve with these groups. A series of focus questions he had developed were then given to workshop groups [based on seated tables] to formulate a response. Each table group reported their ideas to the assembled group.

Each group was asked to nominate a representative to a Joint Working Party. These representatives, including myself, have provided amendments to the Draft Community Engagement Policy based on the deliberations of their group. [Council has organized a Google Document facility, secure to the representatives for this]. These collective amendments create a further Draft Policy, which will be considered at a meeting tomorrow morning, June 21, of the community representatives and Council. This may be the first of a number of such meetings. It does seem however that this first stage has limped along somewhat due to confusion over the process, lack of representative inputs and the failure of the Council's software facility for document sharing. We shall see what the meeting tomorrow brings to the table.

The draft document will benefit considerably from both the community input, which is being provided from the workshops and a necessary reworking of much of the language and structure of the initial draft though both remain to be discussed.

I am not sure when the Draft would be provided to CCBs such as our Forum though it would certainly need to be at some stage and I would argue for that.

CHRIS GROUNDS