

To Candidates - Port Stephens Council Election – September 13.

Issued by EcoNetwork – Port Stephens Inc. PO Box 97 Nelson Bay 2315. [Email- econet@nelsonbay.com](mailto:econet@nelsonbay.com)

Copy – Open public letter to PSC Candidates

25th August 2008.

EcoNetwork welcomes the coming election as the opportunity for voters to again exercise their democratic right to elect their representatives for the next four year term.

As a candidate for council, and if elected, your role in the democratic council process and decision-making is important to residents and voters across the whole Local Government Area of Port Stephens.

This letter and the following forty-one points of interest, arise from a number of concerns, but more particularly from the incidence in NSW of dysfunctional councils that have been sacked by successive Ministers for Local Government.

Councils sacked at Tweed Heads, Wollongong, Port Macquarie, Shellharbour, and other Local Government Areas, provide a variety of reasons why a council may become dysfunctional and which have made councils and councillors headline news for all the wrong reasons.

Our approach is that it is better to be fully aware of community expectations, as well as the legal requirements of the Local Government Act, Electoral Commission and Council, than have a councillor's integrity eroded and dismantled through the poor behavior of councillors, staff and developers, as already has been so graphically demonstrated elsewhere.

The following short list of community expectations is offered as a guide that may assist to familiarize with some of the too-often disregarded, over-looked or omitted aspects of being a councillor. It is our sincere hope that these notes will be of interest and assistance to you and your fellow candidates.

Yours sincerely

Helen Brown President.

Darrell Dawson Secretary.

PLEASE CONSIDER –

- A councillor occupies a high profile position of trust representing the entire local government area of Port Stephens, as well as the Ward from which a councillor is elected
- The responsibilities, rights and legal obligations of public office, including exposure to public scrutiny
- There are public disclosure requirements regarding property and investments
- A councillor is paid a compensatory annual allowance and reimbursement costs
- As part of a political system, a councillor is a politician, albeit not necessarily a party politician; politics in local government is a reality because that's how our civilization is organized and conducted
- Serving local communities and the council as a creative and enjoyable experience; what prior advice and assistance is received will have lasting value.

A COUNCILLOR NEEDS –

- Understanding of and commitment to the 'common interest' and the 'common good'
- To regard the first year or two as a familiarization and learning experience
- To understand council's Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest provisions; a knowledge of 'confidentiality' and 'commercial in confidence' requirements
- To seek always to unify the council, councillors and local communities
- A positive outlook, avoiding a 'them and us' attitude and approach
- To consult with, seeking information and advice from council managers and staff
- To retain good, working and genial relations with other councillors and staff, irrespective of divisive issues and contested outcomes
- To consider issues on merit within law, current regulation, for sustainable outcomes.

FAMILIARISE WITH –

- The NSW Local Government Act 1993, and the LG (ESD) Amendment Act
- Local Agenda 21 and the Draft Port Stephens Futures Strategy (2008)
- Council strategies and plans, State of Environment Reports, LEP/DCP's/LAP's
- Council's rules of debate and meeting procedures
- Electoral law and its disclosure requirements
- Council and community consultation procedures
- The NSW Local Government and Shires Association
- Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) principles and practice
- Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) and CCP Plus; PSC is a member
- The practice and propriety of short, medium, long-term, co-operative alliances.

AVOIDING THE TRAPS –

- Doing “deals” with fellow councillors, as distinct from the co-operative working alliances stated in the last dot point on page 1
- Non-transparent meetings with developers, and proponents of council DA's
- Developer and corporate donations to fund election campaigns and/or lifestyle
- Turning inward in negative pre-occupation with council managers and staff; which can arise from a lack of positive outlook and relevant policy orientation
- Succumbing to pressures that compromise democratic procedure and merit-based considerations
- Pre-occupation with and public denigration of council officers, of fellow councillors and of democratically decided council strategies, plans, regulations, policies, etc.
- Pandering to negative and misinformed, anti-council opinion
- Intemperate, offensive, and potentially offensive language
- Retaliatory in-kind response to personal offence and abuse.
- Prejudice / intolerances – moral, religious, racial, gender-based, ageist.

THINK FURTHER ABOUT -

- Local Government as one of a three-tiered governmental (Westminster) system and the most accessible and participatory for local communities
 - The practice of deliberative democracy and secular governance
 - Encouraging positive outlook and responses that uphold council and local government as part of our democratic institutional framework
 - Conflict being time consuming and stressful; a knowledge of how to access council-based conflict avoidance and conflict resolution services is essential
 - Opportunities to re-assess existing council strategies, plans and regulations exist when these are declared open for council and community comment and input
 - Supporting and being familiar with a raft of sustainable policies that address existing and potential global warming and climate change impacts
 - Constructive criticism and assessment – always to be objective and empathetic.
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