

Questions Submitted in Writing – Ordinary Council Meeting – 22 July 2020

James Judd, Colac

1. **Will all sitting Councillors of the Colac Otway Shire Council make a public declaration in open Council before nominations open for the 2020 Council Elections of their position on moving heavy traffic off Murray Street in Colac prior to provision of a ring road or bypass being introduced? As it is multiple elections since the last major attempt by Council to gain support of the community to detour heavy traffic through residential areas and near schools?**

Response from Chief Executive

This is a matter for each sitting Councillor to determine. It is not appropriate for a Council officer to respond further to these questions.

2. **How are Councillors elected to the Colac Otway Shire Council? Is it based on percentage of valid votes cast; or, based on minimum percentage of authorised voters casting a vote and obtaining a minimum percentage of valid votes cast?**

Response from Chief Executive

The Victorian Electoral Commission conducts elections on behalf of Victorian local governments and information about voting can be found on its website at www.vec.vic.gov.au or by phoning 131 832.

3. **How much money does the Colac Otway Shire Council outlay to promote Colac each year when it does not check to make sure all promotions are accurate? We have had inaccurate maps put up in Colac for over 10 years that are supposed to promote Colac.**

Response from General Manager, Infrastructure & Leisure Services

Council officers are not completely certain as to what this question is referring to however if it is with regards to a map on a sign that was on the Memorial Square toilets, this was not owned by Council. Council officers contacted the owners of the sign and when no response was forthcoming, the sign was removed.

4. **Once land is received at the High School site, has the Colac Otway Shire Council yet made any investigation about obtaining any of the multi-million dollars it will require to develop playing fields at this site from other bodies since the report to Council on this matter listed a requirement of millions of dollars would be required to develop the fields? Plus the obligation on Council to satisfy open space and playing fields to meet what would be required under the Colac Growth Plan including the provision of these fields when no other area considered if that land not be available.**

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

Council is still negotiating with the Victorian Government on acquiring part of the former Colac High School site. Once this has been finalised, Council will then need to undertake a master planning process in partnership with the community to determine how the land would be developed. It is not until this process has been completed that Council would work on advocating for funding to develop facilities identified in the master plan.

5. **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has been spreading around the world during the last nine months, with major outbreaks in heavily populated areas and places with poor health services, has the Colac Otway Shire considered the need for far more health services being required in Colac if the Colac Growth Plan is ever to go ahead?**

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

The current COVID-19 outbreak and response of health authorities to manage its impact on the community has no bearing on the future health needs of the Colac community as it grows in size. Colac Area Health, as well as other allied and associated health and community health services, will continue to adjust their planning for future service and infrastructure needs to match growth as it occurs.

Yvonne Francis, Apollo Bay

1. **I have heard that COS spent a grant of \$2.1m to upgrade Binns Track (or Road) for tourism access; and, is this upgrade on the Colac side of the attraction; and, is this upgrade more favourable to logging when according to traffic statistics coastal tourists would hardly benefit? And was the appropriate public consultation adequate?**

Response from General Manager, Infrastructure & Leisure Services

The Binns Road upgrade project was co-funded by the State Government and Council at a total cost of around \$2.1 million. The State Government contributed just under \$1.5 million in funding.

The upgrade included sealing of a 5.8 kilometre section of Binns Road on the north / Colac side of the Redwoods attraction, from Beech Forest Rd / Mt Sabine Rd to the Redwoods carpark.

The upgrade primarily benefits tourists and locals visiting multiple attractions on this section of the route, including: The Californian Redwoods, Congram Waterfall, Beauchamp Falls campground and Hopetoun Falls or using this alternative route between Apollo Bay and Beech Forest.

The upgrade has reduced travel time between Apollo Bay and Beech Forest for people travelling in either direction. Logging trucks also use the area, however this was not the primary objective or benefit of the upgrade. Traffic data indicates that the majority of tourists and visitors visiting the area's attractions come from the north / Colac side.

Graham Costin, Apollo Bay

My question[s] relates to the availability of affordable housing for younger people who grow up in towns along the Great Ocean Road. Surf Coast Shire has reportedly said that less than 20% of residential sales within its municipality during 2019/20 were to first home buyers. This likely indicates that many of its younger people were unable to afford to buy their first home in the areas where they grew up.

1. **Within Colac-Otway Shire, what were the corresponding total and disaggregated first home buyer ratios for the towns along the Great Ocean Road in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20?**

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

This is not information Council captures and therefore cannot provide a response to this question.

2. **What is Council doing to improve local housing affordability for its younger people who grow up along the Great Ocean Road?**

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

Council is well aware of the housing affordability issues for young people in coastal towns along the Great Ocean Road, and is actively participating in a State funded project, the Great Ocean Road Key Worker Study, to explore ways in which this issue can be addressed. The study is being undertaken in partnership with other municipalities along the coast within our region, with a particular emphasis on finding pathways to solutions for addressing shortages of housing for workers in the towns, whether this be housing for purchase or rental. The project will be completed shortly and reported to Council.

3. **My [next] question relates to the impact of COVID-19 on the Colac-Otway Shire economy(s), and the coastal community's dissatisfaction with Council's targeting of COVID-19 economic stimulus funding to date. G21/GORRT reported that the Geelong region will experience between 4700 (best case) and 6330 (worst case) job losses in the visitor and tourism sector during 2020/21 due to COVID-19. What is Council's forecast for jobs losses within Colac-Otway Shire during 2020/21, and how many of those job losses are expected in Council's coastal economies?**

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

This is not information that Council forecasts. Council does track actual changes in the number of jobs within Colac Otway Shire through weekly payroll data released by ABS Data. According to the most recently released ABS data, the South West Victorian region experienced a 9.4% decrease in the total number of jobs between 31 March and 30 May 2020. The coastal areas have experienced a greater decrease in jobs than other areas of the shire.

4. **If the answers to above are known, how many jobs does Council expect its \$1.7 million proposal for Federal COVID-19 Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program economic stimulus funding will create in 2020/21, and how many of those jobs will be created in Council's coastal economies?**

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

Standard modelling using REMPLAN Economy estimates that a \$1.7 investment in roads and community infrastructure would create nine jobs over the life of the project including the direct, supply chain and consumption effects. Modelling does not allow Council to predict the location of the jobs. Council has attempted to spread the \$1.7m spend across the shire, with a focus on projects that will utilise local businesses and can be completed within 12 months.

5. **If the answers are not known, how does Council propose to geographically target any future COVID-19 economic stimulus funding programs to best assist those who have lost their incomes and will suffer financial distress during 2020/21?**

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

Council is considering a 'proposed COVID-19 business and community support package' at its July 2020 Ordinary Council Meeting. Proposed measures aim to stimulate local and visitor consumption. The retail trade sector and accommodation and food services sector have

experienced the largest proportional revenue decrease and number of job losses within Colac Otway. Funding that stimulates consumption will directly benefit these sectors and therefore geographical locations that have been most heavily impacted.

Proposals also include a targeted marketing campaign at domestic visitation to Apollo Bay and the Otways.

Nasser Kotb, Forrest

- 1. Local councils around Australia are banning the use of glyphosate, and “On 1st May 2020 the Federal Court determined that the class action run by Maurice Blackburn would be heard before any other class action about Roundup”. Would the Council provide the details of sprays they use that contain glyphosate?**

Response from General Manager, Infrastructure & Leisure Services

We currently use glyphosate products based on this information. A glyphosate product we currently use is Weed Master Duo and Wipe Out Bio 360g/L.

- 2. Would the Council list the weeds that are the target of their spraying operations, as well as the sprays used to target each weed (or group of weeds)?**

Response from General Manager, Infrastructure & Leisure Services

A list of weeds and the chemicals used to control them are on Council’s website at the following location:

<https://www.colacotway.vic.gov.au/Works-Projects/Upcoming-Weed-Control-Works>

- 3. COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria have been applied since February 2020. Even Stage 4 restrictions are expected. The Council has been slow in reacting to the changing conditions. This weak leadership is of a great concern. As a consequence, the values of democracy and transparency suffered. Democracy and facilitating interaction of citizens with the decision making process should be a top priority for the Council. Would the Council explain the following:**

- 1. Does the Council have an Action plan instituted (since February 2020) to maintain the democratic process and facilitating interaction of citizens with decision making?**
- 2. Why did the Council fail to provide a digital platform to facilitate interaction of citizen with decision making process after nearly five months of restrictions?**
- 3. When would the Council provide the necessary digital platform to facilitate interaction of citizens with decision making process (provide exact date)?**

Response from Chief Executive

Council has been complying with the relevant Directions as issued and updated by the Chief Health Officer of Victoria, as well as acting on advice from Local Government Victoria as it is issued, with respect to the continuity of Council business via decision-making at Council meetings throughout this pandemic.

Provisions made for local governments within the COVID-19 *Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020* included temporary changes to the *Local Government Act 2020* to enable councils to meet

virtually if required from 1 May to 1 November 2020. Colac Otway Shire Council has been operating within the parameters provided for in this legislation by livestreaming Council meetings and changing the way in which questions submitted for the meeting are handled, in the absence of the ability of the public to physically attend to ask questions.

While question time is not physically occurring at Council meetings at present, the measures put in place provide for questions to be answered expediently and transparently, with the publication of questions and answers on Council's website the following day. Please note that while community members aren't able to attend at this time – as provided for in the legislation mentioned above – the opportunity for community participation at meetings remains the same. An important function of these temporary operational changes at Council meetings is to limit the length of time people spend together to help prevent transmission of COVID-19.

Now that the pandemic is directly impacting the Shire, Council will continue to reassess the way in which it conducts its Council meetings.

As the provider of several essential services to the community, Council has had to manage its ever-changing pandemic response while at the same continuing to deal with necessary Council business. Considering the limited resources available and the enormous additional burden this pandemic has placed on Council, recent information technology efforts have been focussed on facilitating the ability of the majority of the workforce to work from home - the fundamental work which enables the continuation of Council business. Now that this resourcing is largely in place, the focus can, and is, shifting to the improved facilitation of virtual meetings, not just live streaming.

Testing is soon to be conducted on technological improvements aimed firstly to allow Councillors and officers to virtually attend Council meetings. Once this system is operating successfully alongside the live-streaming of meetings, it may be possible to allow some community members the opportunity to ask questions during Question Time, however the current method where all questions are pre-submitted appears to be working well, judging by the number of questions received each month. As Council becomes able to offer more interaction, Council will promote this in the print media and via its social media channels.

Noor Petersen, Forrest

- 1. Can Colac Otway Shire provide the obstacles/reasons as to why it cannot implement an 'urban greening' policy thereby allowing residents to plant nature strips with food and/or bee/bird friendly specimens? Many Victorian Shires already allow this, thereby reducing air and noise pollution related to mowing whilst enhancing the environment, supporting sustainability and aiding mental health/wellbeing for the owners and all who view these creations.**

Response from General Manager, Infrastructure & Leisure Services

Council Policy 13.6 Street Tree Maintenance, Section 24(d) allows residents to plant vegetation in the nature strip subject to an approval process through the Local Laws team. The policy sets out the issues that Council will consider when choosing the type of street trees to be planted and how they will be maintained. The policy is due to be reviewed and presented to Council within the next 6 months.

2. Can Colac Otway Shire seriously commit to a positive 'urban greening' policy, and give a time frame as to when this can be adapted?

Response from General Manager, Infrastructure & Leisure Services

Council has not considered this issue but certainly could do so.

3. Covid-19 has been declared an emergency across the globe. Given the far reaching impact of the devastating conditions besetting the globe due to climate change, please explain why the Shire I reside in stubbornly refuses to acknowledge this far greater 'emergency'.

Kindly note the following definitions of emergency:

Cambridge, Collins and Oxford: something dangerous or serious, such as an accident, that happens suddenly or unexpectedly and needs fast action in order to avoid harmful results.

Webster: an unforeseen combination of circumstances or the resulting state that calls for immediate action and an urgent need for assistance or relief.

And from Lexico: Origin mid 17th century from medieval Latin emergentia, from Latin emergere 'arise, bring to light'.

What prevents the Colac Otway Shire to 'arise and bring light' to the emergency the planet faces? And please spare me any rehashed goobledgook saying that scientists have not reached a consensus!

Response General Manager, Development & Community Services

A report has been provided to Council in response to a community petition that asks for Council to acknowledge a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency. The report will be considered by Council at its July 2020 Ordinary Council Meeting and a decision should not be pre-empted, however it does makes recommendations for Council to consider.

Carol Wilmink, Apollo Bay

Re: Item: 10.1 Petition - Climate and Biodiversity Emergency

Apollo Bay relies on the Great Ocean Road for its visitors – who enable our businesses to exist, and our local people to also enjoy the facilities required to service these visitors. Some of the water and sewage lines to Skenes Creek and Marengo are on the sea-side of the Great Ocean Road.

This image is on page 6 of the petition you are asked to support:

- A drawing that puts it all in perspective.



These photos were taken a few year ago, from a house overlooking the Great Ocean Road in Apollo Bay.



'The Wave'.



'The Wave' over Great Ocean Road at Joyce Street, Apollo Bay.

Your officer's report states: *"it is evident that a significant number of people in the community are concerned about the impacts of climate change."* By its actions and policies, I believe that Colac Otway Shire has already acknowledged that Climate Change is taking place. Please don't wait until sections of the Great Ocean Road are washed away, the road is closed and you, as our Local Government, need to take action to have the situation remedied.

1. Why can't our local government representatives: "Acknowledge that we are in a state of climate emergency' NOW, and then make representation to State and Federal Governments for PREVENTATIVE ACTION to save the Great Ocean Road?"

NONE of the reports supplied for this petition mention that the Great Ocean Road may need to be closed due to it being washed away. Land-slips are very serious, but can be cleared away much quicker than a new road can be built. The Great Ocean Road is the BIGGEST earner from tourism in Australia. Colac Otway Shire may be able to influence a serious look at its maintenance, and continued existence.

Response from General Manager, Development & Community Services

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