

Questions Submitted in Writing – Council Meeting – 28 July 2021

Moira Deeming, Taylors Hill

- 1. Under Victorian law, is it legal for Local Government Councils to provide sex based/targeted services and facilities separately to gender identity based/targeted services and facilities? If not, why not? For example, can we legally put signs on a set of public toilets declaring that one is for biological males (including males with an intersex condition), one is for biological females (including biological females with an intersex condition) and one is for people with transgender identities (of any biological sex)? If not, why not?**

Response from General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Council is not aware of any law which prevents gender specific signage. The design of future public facilities will benefit from the current thinking regarding equity and gender neutrality.

James Judd, Colac

- 1. Instead of the Colac Otway Shire Council using money and much officers time to look at what it wants in the future, that it often cannot afford unless large amounts of money are received first from other bodies, but put at least equal time and money into fixing what it has and making sure they are kept in proper condition to give the service that are supposed to be provide at all times, not keep neglecting spending money to upgrade infrastructure (ie) drains, footpaths and safe sight lines on all roads or advocate to the responsible authority to keep sight lines clear at all times since many roads are managed parts by various authorities.**

Response from General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Council does not neglect to undertake repairs, maintenance and renewal works on all of its assets. Indeed, a large proportion of the annual budget is allocated to these tasks, with only a small percentage allocated to new or upgraded assets. Council is bound by its legislative obligations under the *Road Management Act* to ensure the road environment is safe in accordance with prescribed intervention levels and response times outlined in the Colac Otway Shire Road Management Plan 2021. Council's compliance with the Road Management Plan sits at over 90%. Officers regularly advocate to Regional Roads Victoria for road safety and condition improvements and we collect data on road use and undertake Road Safety Audits throughout the year to support our efforts.

- 2. Does the Colac Otway Shire Council have Public Liability Insurance to cover the public when using the coin in the slot barbeques installed by the Council at locations in this Shire should they malfunction and cause injury to persons or damage to property? If so, what is the cover and what is covered?**

Response from General Manager, Corporate Services

Yes, Council has Public Liability Insurance cover of \$600m. This covers personal injury, damage to property and products liability caused by an occurrence in connection with Colac Otway Shire. This covers any possibility of claims of negligence against Council.

3. Will the Colac Otway Shire Council please advise the community on recycling of plastic items since a south west council has come out and advised people that not all markings that look like a recycling symbol actually indicate this. But some are only a resin code that also advise of the organisations who can assist in knowing what is recyclable when some of these bodies are also in this municipality?

Response from General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Yes we will. We intend to increase our efforts to educate our community on all aspects of waste management and the classification of recycling material will be part of this work.

4. With all the talk about reducing greenhouse gases being added to the atmosphere by the Colac Otway Shire Council how long before the use of coin in the slot barbeques in public parks that the Council put in are prohibited or restrictions placed on what is allowed to be cooked using the barbeques as all cooking gives off some fumes.

Response from General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Council has no plans to control the type of food that is cooked on the BBQs.

5. Prior to the Council announcing a proposal for more buildings on some blocks to ease the housing crisis, what consideration for an urgent infrastructure upgrade did officers take into account? The drainage system needs a very urgent upgrade as many of the drains are unable to handle run-off after a short heavy rain storm. All extra buildings in an area will increase the speed of run-off. Plus, very much extra water supply will be needed to cater with the increased demand. Also a much larger sewerage system will be needed to cater for the increased demand on the system. The roads will be far more dangerous as far more vehicles will be required to park on roadsides. The time taken for garbage collections will be increased because of more bins being put out for collection and access to bins could be blocked by vehicles parked on roadsides. There would be far more pressure on Council to provide many more parks so people could exercise or do other activities out of doors as limited space would be provided near place of abode.

Response from General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

The demand for infrastructure and service upgrades will inevitably increase as Colac's population continues to grow. Council periodically undertakes reviews of the need for these upgrades, and plans for them to occur as required. This often requires advocacy for supporting State and Federal grants. Council will be undertaking strategic planning in 2021/22 year for the rezoning of growth areas identified in Colac 2050 to examine what infrastructure upgrades (for both physical and community infrastructure) are required due to demand arising from these rezoned areas. Council will also be placing requirements on developers to make payments for developer contributions that assist in funding these upgrades. Developers are required to install drainage infrastructure within subdivisions to control the flow of stormwater in flood conditions, and the Colac Stormwater Development Plan gives guidance on the location and type of major stormwater infrastructure which will be required across Colac's growth areas. Things such as stormwater retention and treatment systems. In addition Council will be undertaking a full system condition audit in 2022/23 (so that's the condition of the drains) which will guide annual expenditure for repairs, maintenance and upgrades. In respect of sewerage, Barwon Water has a responsibility to upgrade its sewerage network and treatment facilities to respond to growth as it occurs.

Meredith Kefford, Clifton Hill

1. I want to know why Colac Otway Shire is not part of VECO - the Victorian Energy Collaboration: veco.org.au. It's the largest emissions reduction project ever undertaken by the local government sector in Australia. By using renewable energy it'll be saving 260,000 tonnes of carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere. What is Colac Otway's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and act on climate change?

Response from General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Colac Otway Shire was one of the first regional Councils to be deemed 'carbon neutral' in its own operations. Council currently obtains green energy and purchases carbon emissions offsets and this enables Council to be carbon neutral. The Victoria Energy Collaboration is a great initiative and offers Councils a renewable energy contract. However, these contracts are long term contracts (up to 10 years) that may preclude Councils from buying locally produced renewable energy in the future.

Colac Otway Shire implemented a range of measures to reduce its carbon footprint as well as generate its own power from solar panels. Council will continue to explore opportunities to further reduce its carbon emission. Over the next several months we will be working on our 2022 Environment Strategy, we encourage you to provide feedback during the public consultation phase.

Nassar Kotb, Forrest

1. The Council has taken a leadership role when it formally opposed "*the use of seismic testing to look for oil and gas in the Otway Basin.*"

The Council has a great opportunity to continue with its leadership for the protection of the environment through facilitating the institution of a new environmentally as well as economically beneficial to mitigate carbon emissions, and thus climate change, through policy and voluntary markets by creating interest in a rapidly growing aquatic farming sector of seaweed.

Seaweed farms release carbon that maybe buried in sediments or exported to the deep sea, therefore acting as a CO2 sink. The crop can also be used, in total or in part, for biofuel production, with a potential CO2 mitigation capacity, in terms of avoided emissions from fossil fuels. Seaweed aquaculture can also help reduce the emissions from agriculture, by improving soil quality substituting synthetic fertiliser and when included in cattle feed, lowering methane emissions from cattle. Seaweed aquaculture contributes to climate change adaptation by damping wave energy and protecting shorelines, and by elevating pH and supplying oxygen to the waters, thereby locally reducing the effects of ocean acidification and de-oxygenation.

Seaweed offsetting is not the sole solution to climate change, but it provides an invaluable tool for a more sustainable future.

Would the Council explore the potential and possibilities of "seaweed cultivation/farming" in the Shire's coastal area?

Response from General Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

Council is pleased to learn a little about the benefits of seaweed farming and would certainly be interested in supporting the concept with suitable organisations who are in the business of turning these ideas into reality.

Prabha Kutty, Colac

1. **Whilst commending the work put in by members of the community panel for the 2050 community vision, I do have one question regarding the process and Council's brief given to the panel.**

Given its importance towards the successful realisation of the 2050 community vision, why is it that neither the community survey nor Council's remit to the community panel included a request to consider the suitability and effectiveness of Council's current governance structure and rules?

Response from General Manager Development & Community Services

As with any deliberative process, the amount of time we had to spend with our deliberative panel was finite. Council chose to ask the panel to focus on the areas it saw as the biggest challenges facing the organisation and our community going forward, being at a high level, considering our limited resources and capacity to service growing community demand. In particular, Council asked the panel to focus on three particular issues of the environment, housing, and our assets and services. These three areas are deep and complex, and took up all the time the panel had allocated.

2. **Whilst complementing council on the improved ratings in the 2020 Customer Satisfaction Survey, I would like to ask whether council does undertake an analysis of the reasons for areas of poor ratings and develop strategies to improve it and if so whether the changes from last year can be attributed to the change in strategies implemented from the previous year?**

As examples I refer to the consistent low ratings across the years from residents at Apollo Bay as well as ratings for Planning and Building.

Response from Chief Executive

In my time here we have reviewed the survey report and produced an action plan to address the areas of most significant concern. Improvements in several services including waste management, sealed and unsealed roads over the past 12 months, can be attributed to a stronger focus on education around waste management practices within the community, stronger advocacy of sealed roads for which Regional Roads Victoria are responsible for and they take up most of the roads that people complain about and improved processes for assessing works needed on unsealed roads.

The focus from the 2021 Community Satisfaction Survey results will be to continue working with the Apollo Bay and surrounds community and continuing to implement improvements with planning and building services. It's important to note these improvements can take some time and work that we started three years ago is probably only now being felt by the community, particularly in the area of roads and services at Apollo Bay. And they're not immediately reflected in the following year's survey results.