

Council happenings . . .

with Mayor
Glenn Wall

Country Link Booking Fee Tax.

The member for Upper Hunter, the Hon. George Souris has welcomed the introduction of a Liberal / Nationals Coalition "Private Members Bill" in Parliament to axe the NSW Government's unfair booking fee tax for Pensioners travelling on CountryLink Services throughout the State.

The Government imposed the booking fee tax on Pensioners in March last year. The booking fee is charged when Pensioners use their free travel vouchers to book train travel on CountryLink Services. The fee is either \$10 or 15% of the Full Adult Fare for the equivalent journey each way, **whichever total is the highest.**

Since the introduction of the booking fee tax, the number of Pensioners utilising CountryLink services has fallen according to Mr. Souris's office. "When you have a situation where Pensioners are now being forced to pay 15% of the Full Adult fare for used to be free train travel throughout NSW, Pensioners are going to stop using the Service".

The Private Members Bill will be debated when Parliament resumes in September. To find out more information or offer support of the Members Bill please contact Mr. Souris's Office on 6543 1065 or upperhunter@parliament.nsw.gov.au.

Clarence Town Sewerage Scheme.

Council has received the long awaited offer from the Minister for Emergency Services and Water Utilities, The Hon Nathan Rees MP advising the level of subsidy that the NSW Government will contribute towards the capital cost of the Clarence Town Sewerage Scheme.

We have been offered 59.5% of capital costs, which equates to \$5.5 million in state funding towards the current estimated cost of \$9.3 million for the construction of the sewerage scheme.

Council did not expect that we would receive the maximum subsidy of 67% due to population growth above the 1996 census figures used by the government, and the practical need to increase the capacity of some components.

This results in Council and residents of Clarence Town being required to fund approximately \$4.2 million to cover the construction works for the Scheme, with annual charges to residents of about \$1,244 per annum following construction of the Scheme.

Council's original estimates in the Options Report of 2000 anticipated total scheme capital costs of under \$6 million, with the required loan for the community being under \$2 million. The associated annual sewerage charges to residents were to be between \$550 and \$600.

In view of the substantial difference, Council has been investigating alternative options concerning the water and wastewater operations, in order to reduce the annual costs to residents of Clarence Town, and we are now ready for discussions with the community.

The three scenarios under consideration are:

1. Proceed with the construction of the Clarence Town Sewerage Scheme with the full cost being borne by the ratepayers of that Scheme.
2. Consolidate Council's water and sewerage business operations to minimise the financial burden upon the residents of Clarence Town.
3. Negotiate with the Hunter Water Corporation regarding alternative models to secure an outcome that could be advantageous to our community.

There are advantages and disadvantages with each scenario, and as soon as possible, Council will be meeting with each community to consider the options available.

29 August 2007