

# Council happenings . . .

with Mayor  
Glenn Wall

## **Local Government Elections 2008.**

Due to a confliction with the School holidays the NSW Government has changed the date of the Local Government Election from Saturday 27 September 2008 to 13 September. The Electoral Rolls will close on Monday 4th August, voting is compulsory so those eligible for voting who have not already done so will need to register by that date.

The NSW Electoral Commission will conduct the election, whereas in the past council could engage local people to manage the process and man the booths etc. The protocols of the Electoral Commission and its associated staffing costs will result in at least a doubling of election costs, and so Council will have to divert an extra \$40,000 from other areas of the budget.

We have been considering various measures to contain election costs. Unfortunately, for 2008 we cannot afford to operate polling booths at Wallarobba (100 voters) and Salisbury (50 voters). Persons thus inconvenienced should consider applying for a postal vote.

For those interested in standing for election for the next four year term on Council, nominations will close on Wednesday 13th August, and registration of "How to Vote" material will close on Monday 25th August.

The Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW has a booklet "Becoming a Councillor" which may be ordered through their website ([www.lgsa.org.au](http://www.lgsa.org.au)). Also, during July/August the Associations will conduct a series of seminars for intending candidates (usually held at Maitland). Both these resources are highly recommended.

## **On-Site Sewage Management Program**

After completing the initial round of inspections required under its On-Site Sewage Management Program, Council records indicate that there are 2,594 on-site sewage management systems in the Shire, excluding those systems in the village of Clarence Town that will be replaced by the sewerage scheme.

Since the Program commenced in late 2001 , all of these systems have been inspected and assessed with 495 identified as High Risk and Failing, 386 High Risk, 730 Medium Risk, 930 Low Risk, with 53 new systems awaiting completion for final approval.

Significantly, over 30% of all systems were assessed as High Risk, or High Risk and Failing. Over the last six years, council staff conducted a total of 3148 inspections including 554 re inspections of failing systems requiring rectification measures. In most of these cases, residents were given 12 months to address shortcomings.

A follow up program involving those non-compliant High Risk Failing and High Risk systems has commenced, and of the 174 systems inspected in the last three months, the majority (approx 86%) have been upgraded to a satisfactory standard. However, 42 Orders have been issued where previously identified failures have not been rectified. Owner/operators of these systems have been advised that they have 6 months to complete work or action under the Local Government Act will be commenced and fines issued.

Now that all systems have been inspected and the prevailing situation throughout the Shire has been assessed, council staff are in the process of reviewing the On-site Sewage Management Program and will develop a new strategy in consultation with the community. This new strategy will need to provide for the upgrade, ongoing management and monitoring of the high-risk septic systems, and outline appropriate measures for medium and low risk systems.

Sewerage is the obvious answer for villages like Gresford, Martins Creek, Paterson, and Vacy, but the lack of NSW Government funding towards its Country Towns Water and Sewer Program since 1995 has resulted in these areas now having a very low priority under this scheme. With the transfer of the water and sewer operations to Hunter Water Corporation, sewerage of these villages will be a matter for them to consider, however any progress in this area will be still be well into the future. In the interim, the management of all domestic septic systems comes under the Local Government Act and Council will need to develop appropriate strategies to manage on-site systems shire wide.

19 March 2008