

Council happenings . . .

with Mayor
Glenn Wall

Environmental Trust Grants for 2008.

Applications are open for grants under the NSW Government's Environmental Trust programs for 2008. Guidelines and application forms are available on the Trust website www.environmentaltrust.nsw.gov.au or by phoning 02 8837 6093

The grant categories are Environmental Research - available to community organisations, universities and research institutes; Environmental Education and Environmental Restoration and Rehabilitation - available to community organisations and non-profit associations and State and local government organisations; and the Protecting Our Places – Aboriginal Grant Program - available to any Aboriginal community group or organisation.

Schools are not eligible for the Environmental Education programs, but the Eco Schools Grant Program is open to those schools that did not receive an Environmental Trust grant in 2007.

Planning Reforms – Independent Report on Submissions.

The Minister for Planning, the Hon. Frank Sartor MP, has released a report on the submissions received in response to the discussion paper 'Improving the NSW planning system'.

The report analyses key issues raised in the 538 submissions received from individuals and stakeholder groups. Of the 31 key recommendations suggested in the original discussion paper, there was general support for 12, mixed views on ten and general opposition to nine.

Concern was expressed about the timing of the release of the discussion paper over the Christmas/New Year period and the short timeframe allowed for lodging of submissions.

There was general support for the recommendations relating to rezonings and plan making, although councils and community groups felt that LEP amendments should be left to councils. There was strong opposition to any extension of the private certification system for monitoring compliance with building standards.

Other matters of concern included perceptions of the loss of community involvement in planning processes, a one size fits all approach to Exempt and Complying Development, and dilution of local government decision-making.

Unfortunately, many of these issues would mean little to the general public as planning processes have become so complex that few ordinary people can understand them. NSW now has over 260 legislated environmental planning instruments regulating development applications.

It is by far the most complex planning system in Australia, requiring extra work for all concerned. Councils tend to receive all the blame for inherent delays and it is disappointing that the complex and contradictory nature of planning legislation has not been addressed by the proposed reforms.

Council accepts the need for planning reform, as few could doubt that the planning system needs to become more efficient and easier for families and small business to negotiate. But this needs to be balanced with continued transparency and accountability for the community regarding planning and development decisions.

We are concerned that wide sweeping changes are being rushed through that would introduce new problems and that the present reform process is dominated by problems being experienced in the city rather than the bush.

After taking all submissions into consideration the Minister will reassess the reform proposals and amend as necessary. It is expected that the final legislation will be enacted by mid 2008.

Copies of the report are available from the Department of Planning.
http://planning.nsw.gov.au/planning_reforms/p/improving_the_nsw_planning_system_submissions_report.pdf
2 April 2008