

# Council happenings . . .

with Mayor  
Glenn Wall

## Extension of the NSW Government Waste and Environment Levy

As I advised in Happenings previously, Section 88 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 has been amended to include most Councils to the north of Port Stephens and to the east of the Great Dividing Range from 01 July 2009. This levy had previously only applied to the Sydney Metropolitan and Extended Metropolitan Areas of Newcastle, Wollongong and the Lower Hunter.

In our area the proposed Section 88 levy will increase incrementally over seven years, and commenced on the 01 July at \$10 per tonne of all waste through the landfill gate. The levy will increase by an additional \$10 each year plus CPI until it reaches \$70 per tonne (plus CPI adjustments) in 2015/2016. The levy is supposedly used as an incentive to reduce the reliance of local authorities on the landfill option, to encourage alternate waste technology and promote reuse and recycling strategies by waste generators.

The guidelines and legislation require that Council have in place a raft of changes at the landfill and within the accounting process. Operationally these changes will add significantly to the current workload of staff and to the administration required to run a landfill that receives only 3000-3500 tonne of waste a year.

The implementation of these changes will also require a significant amount of work within the proposed timeframe, result in additional costs to the public, businesses and Council and require ongoing resources in the receipt, accounting and reporting areas.

The new regulations also amend the threshold from 10,000 tonne to 5,000 tonne per annum where facilities will need to operate with a weighbridge. This change will take effect in mid 2011. Councils waste to landfill is currently around 3200 tonne per annum, however as some capping material is also subject to the Sec 88 Levy, even with moderate growth, it is likely that Council will be required to install a weighbridge at the landfill in the near future. As advised by the Minister, some of the costs of installing new equipment at the landfill can be offset by access to the levy contributions in the first two years of the levy's operation. The amount of money however is limited to around \$1000 per 1000 head of population (\$8,500 in the Dungog Shire) while the cost of a weighbridge is around \$150,000.

Council's landfill fees in 2008/2009 were based on \$65/tonne. From July 1 the landfill fees will be based on \$80 per tonne to include the DECC levy and meet some of the new management and administration costs. The introduction of the levy will over time have a significant impact on tip fees, Councils Domestic Waste Charge, community programs and Councils own operational costs.

When the levy reaches the maximum rate in 2016, even at 3,500 tonne of waste, with the addition of daily capping material, users of the landfill will be paying over **\$300,000** a year in Sec 88 charges, which is directed straight back to the NSW Government. This will add significantly to the cost of landfilling waste and bring other options for disposal into consideration. In light of the section 88 levy changes, prior to Councils waste and recycling collection contracts being renewed in 2013 and before making a significant capital outlay for a weighbridge, Council will need to consider its waste disposal options and renew the current waste strategy.

In years past, Council made some very hard decisions with regards to the Landfill closures in Paterson, Martins Creek and Gresford due to the ever increasing EPA requirements. However, with these closures came the introduction of a reliable and cheap garbage and recycling collection service, a bulk collection kerb side service and a green waste service, as well as other initiatives that have extended the life of the Dungog Landfill in excess of twenty years.

The introduction of the new Section 88 Levy may only serve to deter people from using the Dungog Landfill. Higher landfill fees could result in an increase in illegal dumping on rural properties, road sides and within Community and Public areas.

This Levy should never have been introduced into small Rural Local Government Areas such as Dungog, Gloucester nor the Upper Hunter and I consider it to be a blatant money grab by DECC. I would urge Community members to express your disappointment with the introduction of this new Levy and direct your concerns to the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt MP, Level 30, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney, NSW, 2000.

In the meantime, to avoid paying higher tip fees, the community should look at ways to reduce waste to landfill by separating recyclable and reusable material from the waste stream. Remember there are no tip fees on sorted material such as scrap metal, waste oil, domestic recyclables, paper and cardboard, drummuster containers and items that can be resold through the tip shop and that green waste is charged at half the standard rate.

8 July 2009