

with Mayor Bill Shannon



Changes to councillors' duties being considered

CONSIDERATION is being given to allocating each councillor a particular area of interest and responsibility, in addition to representing their divisions.

Exactly how any change to the present system will work is being developed. A new Local Government Act will also refine governance arrangements from July 1, 2010.

No change is proposed to the existing decision-making process, at fortnightly council meetings, and the overarching governance principle will still stand. That is, councillors' involvement is at the strategic level, not in day to day affairs.

Any changes to councillors' roles and responsibilities may also result in the need to reconsider the council's media policy, which has been in force since August 2008. This policy generally provides that the mayor gives official comment on council operations.

However all councillors are permitted to make public comment on issues, as long as they specify whether the comment is their personal opinion, or the agreed and approved opinion of the council as a whole.

A Cassowary Coast Regional councillor's job is full time, and all of them work a full time equivalent work load, with night and week-end hours. They are of course entitled to their private time like anyone else in the community, as long as council business takes priority and they realise that, as politicians, they are always on duty and subject to public scrutiny.

Only one councillor, who previously worked for council, was required to give up his job. All others made their own decisions and, as it turned out, resigned from any previous full time employment.

Sometimes, especially for the mayor, the job requires work outside the region. This week I am going to Canberra to be part of a new Australia wide rural lobby group. Councils with over \$100 million gross value of agricultural produce are lobbying for a better deal for local rural roads. The Cassowary Coast Region had Australia's second highest rural production, based on the 2006/07 year. Even when Cyclone Larry had affected banana production and sugar prices were low. In the current economic climate we could be the local government region with the highest rural production area in Australia!

Whilst our region is highly productive and extremely important for food production and foreign exchange earnings, as price takers (as opposed to price setters) there is not always the profitability to pay for the required infrastructure. Australian farmers typically don't set the price of their products. Prices are often determined by international markets, over which producers have no control. Rural roads are typically too narrow and unsealed, with large, heavy vehicles constantly on the move. A specific road funding program by the Federal Government for highly productive areas would pay dividends to our gross national product and foreign exchange earnings and help reduce the burden on ratepayers.

In Canberra I will also be meeting with the Federal Government on funding for the Jubilee Bridge.

I'll report on the outcome when I return.