

Mayor: Council operates with reason

I read with interest the Editorial in last Saturday's *Innisfail Advocate* and have no intention of shooting the messenger because the messenger is reflecting concerns that the local business community and the council have in carrying out their respective roles.

Firstly the points on which there is agreement.

- Council does not want to see a single business close. As the Editorial says "If a business closes it's (sic) doors then that's jobs lost". However, for the case in point there are many factors, including being unable to source specialist staff for the specialist restaurant involved. For the record, no notices have been forwarded to the restaurant in question, nor has there been an inspection in the last 12 months. The Editorial inferred that council's actions were responsible for the business closure.

- Rudeness from council staff is not acceptable in any circumstance, nor is lack of communication. Intimidation is a criminal offence. It is unfortunately true however that council staff, in carrying out their duties from inspecting food outlets to issuing parking notices are often subject to verbal abuse.

- Council staff are guaranteed their employment until March 2011, but councillors are elected. There is nothing in council's policies or intentions regarding staff downsizing when the State Government restrictions are lifted. On the contrary the Cassowary Coast Regional Council

continues to advertise for staff to fill vacancies as they arise.

Now for the points where there is disagreement.

- It is a constant problem for the community to understand the difference between directing and managing. Your assertion that councillors "don't seem to have the gumption to control its officers" simply reflects that you don't understand that the Chief Executive Officer controls staff, not councillors. It is precisely how it should be and as you might recall was at the heart of many of Johnstone Shire's problems.

- Contrary to your view council does conduct its operations with reason. A hallmark of this council is that it does follow the rules. I have seen the photos of some of the conditions in food outlets before we deliberately set out to ensure compliance. It is interesting to note that since council has increased inspections of grease traps there has been a four fold increase (from 20,000 litres per month to 80,000 litres per month) of grease removed from our sewerage system. I make no apology for such actions and believe the community at large would be very supportive. Some of our biggest critics from the business community are operators that have been affected by our crackdown on food safety standards.

- You also make a point of asserting that council is not listening. Nothing could be further from the truth. On September 2

a group of local business operators met with me (after hours to assist with their commitments) regarding several issues.

The outcomes from the meeting was:

- The Johnstone Shire Council fee for issuing footpath space permits was suspended.

- The trade waste fees were explained as cost recovery only.

- The grease trap rules (which apply only to commercial premises) were explained.

- We agreed that formal notices which are of necessity legalistic be accompanied by an explanatory letter.

- Staff and councillors undertake, in the normal course of their professional development, training in conflict resolution and dealing with the public.

I think the most disappointing aspect of the Editorial was its confrontational tone.

There is another way.

The Cassowary Coast Regional Council is challenged by the massive infrastructure backlog and already high rates.

What I would prefer our local paper to do is get behind our region, our Chamber of Commerce and the council in these difficult times.

It would also be appreciated if you checked your facts before publishing articles of this nature in future.

Cr Bill Shannon
Mayor

Cassowary Coast Regional Council