

4 August 2021

Our reference: 1056455

Assistant Minister Nikki Boyd
Email: nikki.boyd@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Office of the Mayor – Cr Rachel Chambers

Dear Assistant Minister

RE: North Burnett visit

I write to thank you for visiting our region last week to gain an understanding of the issues we face as we work towards “a prosperous future for generations built on a solid foundation of customer focused, efficient, and effective service delivery”.

As you know, under the QAO’s current methodology, one-third of Queensland councils are at high risk of becoming financially unsustainable. This means one-third of Queensland communities are at risk of reduced levels of service, reduced capacity to fund asset maintenance and much reduced capital spend on new infrastructure.

From your visit we hope you gleaned an understanding of some of the intricacies of our region but also began to understand the need to prioritise public infrastructure and delivery of public services as the foundation of all communities across Queensland.

My councillors and I appreciated the opportunity to talk to you on the ground and we also appreciated that you chose to drive our roads (and your roads) to gain a further understanding in this key area of investment for all levels of government.

Thank you for commending us on our approach to engaging with our communities so transparently. It is rough for any community to consider service and infrastructure cuts and equally rough for councillors to be the bearer of bad news however, it is our belief that we owe it to our communities to educate them on the real issues so we can work together and plan for future generations.

Thank you for also clarifying that we are not ‘banned’ from borrowing rather that we can always apply for borrowings, it’s just that it may not be approved.

Local Government certainly does a lot of the heavy lifting on the ground to keep our communities functioning effectively however as we spoke about, the State and Federal Governments also have vitally important roles in keeping our communities sustainable for generations to come.

To reiterate our requests to the State Government, please consider these suggestions:

- Review the Works for Queensland methodology and guidelines:
The methodology is currently focussed on unemployment and population figures. The outcome of which can be demonstrated by these 19/21 figures: Fraser Coast Regional Council \$13,650,000; Bundaberg Regional Council \$11,610,000; North Burnett Regional Council \$1,630,000. Is this the best way to achieve the Works for Queensland (W4Q) Program intent to “support regional councils to undertake job-creating maintenance and minor infrastructure projects”?

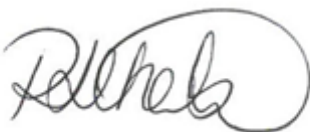
- Review Works for Queensland Guidelines:
E.g. 2.6 “Other requirements” states that program funding is not to be used by council as their contribution towards Commonwealth Government funded programs. With low resourced councils this stops us being able to group various buckets of funding together to achieve expensive projects such as the Biggenden Water Treatment Plant.
- Seek to understand how the Waste Levy is impacting householders:
Our region alone will pay approximately \$500,000 annually to the State Government from July 2022 once the advance payments cease.
- Investigate a funding stream for business cases:
This would allow low resourced councils to better plan their future projects and investments and be on a more equal footing with competitive based grants, along with setting projects up to succeed rather than fail, for the betterment of our communities.
- Prioritise long-term financial sustainability (and therefore community sustainability) of all QLD councils:
Local Government is the foundation of all communities. In previous years the State has prioritised the governance of councils, we now ask you to concentrate on our ability to sustain our communities. No economy can be built upon a crumbling foundation.
- Publicly support councils who are transparently engaging with their communities on highly complex and emotive issues:
Belcarra has taken a lot away from the reputation of Local Government. Work with councils to start rebuilding trust in the sector.
- Support NBRC in being reclassified as “remote” by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development & Communications:
This will lower our grants co-contribution percentage and the ability to be considered for different funding streams and subsidies. Although located just inland from the coast, our region has all the characteristics and challenges of a remote council.
- Support Queensland councils in their campaign to the Commonwealth Government for an increase to untied funding through the Financial Assistance Grants program:
Untied funding where we don’t have to build something new but can invest money into maintaining what we have is one of the corner pieces to local governments foundation.

Finally, as you saw for yourself, our business and industry are highly motivated with many looking to expand their operations. As discussed, and included in your packs, we are moving forward with our new Corporate Plan, ‘A Plan for Generations’.

We want to support and develop existing and future opportunities however, there are some fundamental issues that this Council has tasked itself with resolving, instead of kicking the underlying problem further down the line to future Council’s or State Governments to deal with.

We are willing to put in the hard yards to set this region up future generation and we look forward to working with your Government to support this growth within our region.

Kind regards,



Cr Rachel Chambers
Mayor