

Council Roundup with Lesley Patterson

Councillors find a tender awareness of ethics

James Hardie Industries' cold hearted and unethical actions to dodge its responsibilities to pay compensation to sufferers of asbestos related illnesses victims has spurred many individuals and councils to boycott the company's products. At its meeting on Tuesday last week, Byron Shire Council voted to develop an ethical tendering policy which would allow Council to exclude tenderers which did not meet predetermined ethical standards.

The awarding of a contract to Halliburton subsidiary, Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR), for the Bangalow Sewage Treatment Works, raised hackles among many in the community including Mitra Ardron from Byron Sustainable Ventures Network who spoke at Tuesday's meeting.

'We are being exhorted from many quarters to vote with our dollars and I do not believe this should be restricted to when we are purchasing as individuals. The businesses involved in the Byron Sustainable Ventures Network take account of ethics in their purchasing and I believe we should expect this of our collective purchases at all levels of government,' he said, adding that we should be asking tenderers to disclose certain activities.

'The most obvious disclosures would be of environmental offences for example.

'It would probably have been relevant to Council's decision on the Bangalow Sewage Works that KBR is under investigation by US senators for knowingly supplying water contaminated with sewage to the Iraqi army and preventing its employees disclosing this.'

'I am sure there will be ethical grey areas, and areas where values differ, but that is what Council was elected for. To make hard decisions on behalf of the community at large, and I believe that the majority of cases will in fact be particularly obvious. For example since KBR appears to have silenced its employees from reporting the sewage contamination of drinking water, why would we trust them not to hush up any similar event in Bangalow,' said Mr Ardron.

I should point out here that the shire's drinking water is totally separate from the Bangalow Sewage Treatment Plant and residents should not be alarmed, on that score anywhere. There are plenty of



Sponsored by the Kellogg Brown & Root Historical Society, councillors reenact the significant Battle of the Bangalow Sewerage Plant of 2007. Several egos were harmed in the making of this photo.

other things to be alarmed about and if you can't think of any I'll be giving some suggestions later. All councillors voted to develop a working group to develop an ethical tendering policy, except Cr Tucker who dismissed the idea as 'touchy feely nonsense'.

Things have been humming along in Council quite harmoniously for the past year or so, however Tuesday started badly with the ten councillors split evenly over many issues. On one side sat the four Greens councillors plus independent Peter Westheimer facing independent Crs Tucker, Mangleson, Woods, Tardif and the ALP's Ray Kestle. In these situations the mayor can use her casting vote, which she was forced to do on at least five issues before the end of the day. Despite this, and a pace slow enough to frustrate a snail on Mogadon, a raft of commitments were committed to, decisions decided and plans planned.

Nearly \$140,000 has been sitting in a drawer at Council earmarked for streetscaping. Cr Barham suggested it might be a good idea to spend some of the money and plant a few trees in our streets, native of course.

After lots of argy-bargy, angst and argument about whether we should employ a consultant to draw up a tree planting plan or just get on and do it, Brett Lee, Council's director for getting stuff done, agreed that his staff could prepare some simple plans outlining what to plant where, therefore leaving more

money for shrubs, shovels and Sheoaks.

For a change the north of the Shire got its fair share of attention including a decision to help the Brunswick Heads community develop a DA for a new skatepark at Stan Thompson Oval, a bevy of bike-ways in Brunswick Heads

and coughing up the money for a budget blowout on the Helen Street footbridge (see news pages for the full story).

Byron Bay also got a look-in with a plan to help address the area's crippling teenage unemployment rate.

The Youth Activities

Centre has had its eye on a couple of the cabins surplus to requirements in Council's caravan parks. The idea is to use the cabins for classrooms for young people who have left school without completing their school certificate. Council agreed to allocate the cabins to the YAC and work out where to find the \$22,000 to move and re-stump them at the next quarterly budget meeting.

Before we leave Byron Bay, I should mention Cr Tardif's motion to extend the exhibition period for the draft Byron Bay and Suffolk Park LEP. Eight weeks is not long enough it seems to take a look at the document and make a submission.

Brad Heydon, a prominent member of the Byron Bay Chamber of Commerce, but speaking to Council as an individual, supported Cr Tardif's motion. Cr Barham commented that the LEP had

been discussed at Council and in the press since June 2005 and eagerly awaiting by many in the community. Mr Heydon made the rather startling comment that he had no awareness of the LEP before its exhibition in mid January. The motion was defeated, but only after the Mayor pulled out her casting vote to break the deadlock.

A Council meeting wouldn't be complete without a discussion about sewage. The parlous state of Mullumbimby's sewage pipes, which leak raw sewage into the Brunswick River during heavy rain, has received a fair amount of media coverage recently. It is not a problem for which there is an easy or cheap solution, however Council agreed to Cr Tabart's motion to step up its efforts to sort out the issue, employing a consultant to stick his or her head down pipes and pull out the plunger.

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