

Councillor Column

Shire President Victoria Brown

I would like to refute some of the claims made by the Ratepayers Association and Member for Roe Peter Rundle MLA that appeared in the Esperance Express on Friday August 17. It is disappointing that the Ratepayers Association and Mr Rundle appear to have jumped to some conclusions about our upcoming replacement jetty concept and the level of community consultation before the process begins.

In the article Mr Nieuwerkerke states

“the [Ratepayers] association unanimously carried a motion during a meeting on June 4 to ask council for a public meeting on the design. Shire President Victoria Brown rejected the proposal stating it would not be an effective way to engage the community.”

There was no purpose for holding a public meeting in June about the jetty concept design as it was not developed at that stage, and the Heritage Council had directed us to use a Heritage Architect to design the replacement jetty. Many people might find going to an Electors Meeting or an Ordinary Council Meeting intimidating, so the engagement process selected lets everyone have their say without having to attend a meeting. The public consultation will begin once we have the design from the Heritage Architect.

“Council’s consultation process was not appropriate or sufficient”

Council has not started the consultation process yet. This will begin the moment we have the go ahead from the Heritage Council to move forward. The draft design is being developed by the Heritage Architect, in conjunction with construction engineers, using input from several years of consultation with the community, the Heritage Council, the Shire Council and the Jetty Replacement Working Group. I also invited the Friends of the Jetty Group to meet and talk with Council and the Heritage Architect prior to the development of the new concept, which they did.

The Draft Design will be available for 21 days public comment. During this time, it will be on the Shire’s website, in multiple Shire buildings as well as manned displays around town with staff available to answer questions about the design and how to provide your feedback. Additionally, a hard copy and online survey will be available for the community, with an independent third party responsible for the collection of the data. All the data will be provided back to the Heritage Architect to consider. The data will also assist in collecting information that can be relied upon by the Shire, the Heritage Council and future funding partners for the jetty.

“there is a need for an elaborate discussion with the community which is provided through an electors meeting”

The above engagement process will be far more inclusive than a single electors meeting. It allows everyone an opportunity to have their say without influence from others as well as assisting those who cannot or do not wish to attend meetings. We have chosen a process that will encourage even the busiest members of our community to take a moment and provide some feedback on the Draft Design when it is released.

“if the Heritage Council says ‘we feel the design is okay,’ our view is the community should see that, not as part of some advertising by the shire and then writing a letter here and there”

We couldn't agree more. The community WILL be seeing the Draft Design and WILL be asked to provide input. Any Heritage Council advice on the Draft Design will be included in the information provided to the community. This is the community's opportunity to ensure the replacement jetty has the support of the overall community. The State Government has said this is essential if we want to get funding and build the jetty. Everybody will have a chance to have their say, please don't waste it, we want to hear from all of you. Remember, any community member can call any Councillor at any time. Our phone numbers are on the website. We want to hear from all of you, from the quietest to the loudest voices.

“Roe MLA Peter Rundle said the petition indicated members of the association felt they hadn't been heard on past occasions.”

What is it that makes the group feel that we are not listening, is it simply that we are not agreeing? Having a different opinion does not mean you have not been heard. Any questions received from the Association are responded to. Every month Council hold a Briefing Session and Ordinary Council Meeting (3rd and 4th Tuesday), these are open for all community members including representatives from the Ratepayers Association. Each meeting has a period where attendees can ask questions in person or these can be submitted prior to the meeting for the Shire President to read out.

Two Councillors attend the Association meetings when available and all Councillors will take phone calls. Unfortunately, there are times when decisions must be made that may make some people unhappy. The Council must make decisions that are for the benefit of the whole community and therefore it is expected that there will be differing opinions.

I would like to assure everyone that Council and Shire Staff WILL be engaging with the Esperance Community regarding the Draft Concept Design for a replacement Jetty. The design will include a number of features that have already been identified by the community, as important to the community, whilst also reflecting social, cultural and heritage values. We ask the Esperance Community to engage in consultation, review the design, and provide your personal thoughts and not make any premature decisions regarding the Draft Design until you have seen it. We want a jetty for our town that meets the widest variety of community needs and is financially sustainable for future generations.

We hope the Draft Concept Design will be out for community comment within the next month. The whole community will know the moment the engagement period is open and the plan is available for everyone to see.

Can I reiterate, please don't waste the opportunity to have your say.