

## FROM THE COAST

### How to be heard

Your voice and opinions are probably more powerful than you realise. If you feel that your local, state or federal governments are not listening to you, ask yourself what measures have you taken to make sure your voice is heard? While it is important for governments to engage the public in order to properly and fairly represent them, it is a two way street.

If you take the time to be heard, your shared opinion will have greater impact than you might think. It is easy to post a comment on a viral thread on a Facebook page, and believe it must be filtering through to the relevant organisation or authority, but unless it is on their official corporate page, and not a community or user generated one, there is no guarantee the relevant people will ever even know how you feel. If you have a concern, direct contact with your representative is a very powerful tool.

Voting at election times is just the first step in ensuring you are properly represented. Knowing who your representatives are will help you to easily make contact. The Shire website has the names of your elected officials, as well as telephone numbers and email addresses. Unlike in large cities where Councillors don't necessarily live in the area they represent, your Shire Councillors are also residents. Many people know us as your neighbours, friends and family.

It is also important for you to stay informed about issues before Council and that is why legislation exists to ensure meetings are advertised, open to the public, and agendas and minutes available. You can raise a topic or ask questions at meetings, remembering that your issue is one of many Council need to consider, and that opinions can vary throughout the community. It is not unusual for a typical monthly agenda to be 200 pages long, so it can be challenging to get through all the monthly topics in the time allocated. The best way to be heard is to put your concern in writing and address it to the most relevant person. Shire staff are bound by legislation from responding to some issues, so if you would like a Council response you can post, email or phone the Shire to make sure the message gets to the right person.

There are other ways to have your voice heard such as making an appointment to speak face to face, attend local public meetings, participate in surveys and workshops and send a private message on the appropriate Facebook page. Ranting on Facebook on a page where the person is not an administrator will often be a waste of your time. If you really want to be heard, approach the relevant person armed with facts, stay on point, be polite, be prepared to listen and provide a solution. This is the best way to deliver your message and make sure your voice is heard and given the consideration it deserves.