

Good Afternoon,

Please find responses to 2 questions taken on notice.

Q.1

Ms LIZA BUTLER: In relation to the funding from the RA, have you been successful in getting any of that up-front—and this is for Lismore as well—or have you had to complete the works before you get any of the funding? Because I know that with the number of natural disasters, it is financially draining on councils.

ESMERALDA DAVIS: I might take the question from Byron's perspective. We have certainly been the recipient of some advance payments, which certainly has helped with council's cash flow. That took some time to be realised. I understand from my colleagues in infrastructure services that the advance payments have been more of a recent occurrence, rather than something that was provided immediately post-disaster. There was quite a lengthy process to get to this stage. But I'm happy to take that on notice and provide more detailed information.

Ms LIZA BUTLER: That would be great, thank you.

Response:

Currently, in regards to AGRN 1012, all financial dealings with Public Works Advisory have been finalised and paid except for one which is imminent. The last claim submitted in May 2024 amounting to \$441k was approved by Public Works Advisory but got lost with the Reconstruction Authority due to change in personnel. Public Works Advisory promised to follow it up but this did not progress, so Council directly approached the Reconstruction Authority where the claim has been found.

In regards to the Infrastructure Recovery with Transport for NSW, things were challenging at the start and Council was incurring significant expenditures. However, during the current financial year, the Emergency Works Claim of around \$17million was finalised and fully paid. Council did receive \$8.4million in advance payments relating to that claim. Also during 2023/2024, Council finalised the Immediate Repair Works Claim for around \$1.8million and that has been fully paid. Council is now into the Essential Public Asset Restoration (EPAR) works that some projects are still requiring approvals. Transport for NSW have come up with what is called a Tripartite Agreement that Council signed up to that included the Reconstruction Authority and Transport for NSW. As a result of that Council received an advance payment of \$15.9million including establishment funds for some EPARS yet to be approved. Council has completed one major EPAR being Federal Drive Landslip where claims have been paid plus Council received an advance payment for this project of \$10million. At this stage Council is still holding around \$23million in advance funds from Transport for NSW.

At this point, the cashflow situation for Council has improved greatly in relation to the flood recovery. Potentially, the scale of the AGRN 1012 disaster and the quantum of the damage plus the establishment phase of the Reconstruction Authority function may have all contributed to the initial flood recovery funding delays that created financial strain on the impacted Councils.

Q.2

Mr RICHIE WILLIAMSON: Should that timely rigour be, in your opinion, thrown back on or afforded to local government? Or are you suggesting that, in times of emergency, that should be then to the department of planning or the Minister for the department of planning and—the Act references, I think—the Premier?

DEBORAH STAFFORD: We'll have to take that question on notice and get back to you with the technical advice from our relevant department.

Response:

The assessment can be done either by Council or the Department of Planning or another state government agency provided there is an appropriate level of rigour in that assessment process. Specifically the community need to have confidence in that assessment process

This is more a resourcing issue to ensure that there is appropriate oversight of the works being planned and approved for construction. Such matters for example include but not limited to:

- Ecology
- Bushfire
- Stormwater management
- Flooding
- Cultural heritage matters
- Transport and access
- Amenity and Neighbourhood impacts (overshadowing/ privacy / noise etc)

If the Dept of Planning (or other state govt agency) have that capacity, experience and expertise then such development could remain at a state level.

However if such matters are to be returned to Council to manage and approve, then it is essential that Councils are provided with additional resources to ensure that staff with relevant experience and expertise that are put onto reconstruction work, that other resources are provided to the LGA to enable the general day to day business of Council to continue without limited impacts and delays.

Thank you,
Deb.

Deborah Stafford | Manager Social & Cultural Planning | BYRON SHIRE COUNCIL

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