

City of Charles Sturt Council meeting: presentation

By L J Packer 9 April 2018

I am speaking on this occasion to express my deep disappointment in the attitude of Council towards Public Consultation and the needs of your customers in general. There have been numerous examples of late involving decisions made by Council without Community input or discussion, that have been disastrous, costly (to ratepayers) and downright embarrassing.

Spending \$860,000 on losing a Court case where one of the failures highlighted was a failure to follow your own policy and consult community stands out.

In spite of changes to the original draft PCP the worrying feeling has not gone away.

The draft policy under review tonight seems to be still less inclusive and less workable than the 2000 version.

There is nothing whatsoever wrong with the old one from 2000, but plenty wrong with Council's application thereof. There is an implied understanding in the LGA Act that there is a requirement to consult generally.

There is no implication that it is clever and smart to get away with as little as possible.

Your customers, we the ratepayers, are uniformly disheartened by the total lack of cognition that Council displays following Justice Blue's comments last year. Did you all learn nothing? The original Draft Policy also reduced the input of the elected members so there would be even less communication with your customers than ever.

I am further horrified by the failure to use lessons that should have been learned from this judgment as a way to make a new start, a cultural change and an opportunity to rise above the morass of council problems that generally prevail in this state. The late Brian Anderson referred to the Council as a cesspool.

What happened to consensus, working with your customers and democratic principles?

What makes you think that the narrowest definition, use and spread of expertise and experience will give the best science, information and outcomes?

NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME TO CHANGE THE CULTURE in THE CITY OF CHARLES STURT

In any business, an administration that ignores and maltreats its customers has problems. Councils are really only businesses. The elected members are just

that, perhaps the equivalent of a Board member. Upset enough people and you are no longer the elected member. However, the ratepayers need people of integrity there to represent them and achieve the best outcomes for ratepayers - not sinecure jobs for Council staff and members. If you fit the bill, stand up and be counted come election time. If you lack that integrity, do not stand.

Thirty-five people from multiple wards made time to submit comments on the Draft PCP, in the correct format and in the tight timeframe. The majority of these were negative in many ways towards the new PCP.

Surely this must tell you something that you appear not to be heeding

I have listed some specific problems that I see in the new draft, mainly errors of omission not commission.

- What input was there from Community into this Draft?

Some groups have been asked for input we are told.

Who chose them? On what criteria? Why some, not others?

Where is the ratepayer input into Principles and Definitions for everything the Council does. If these were clear and agreed the problems and disputes would all but vanish.

- What efforts have been made to sample rate payers opinions methodically and what weight was given to any such opinions?

The phrase “extensive and robust consultation” are used not infrequently by staff particularly. That is

absolutely irrelevant if the results are ignored which is what history has told us to be true on many occasions.

- There must be specific measures (Metrics/numbers) on determining how the Council listens and responds. I see no evidence of this yet. As a member of the CPPRG summed it up “we spent fifteen months coming to a decision that we could live with and they completely ignored it”. I can provide his name with his permission.

- What is the procedure for post consultation actions? Consult and ignore will not cut it any more.

Please wake up! Change the culture and thinking. This problem is not unique to this Council by any means so be the leader instead of being the laughing stock. If YOU actually have the skills show them! Use them!

Consultation should be part and parcel of all Council decisions. It should be constant and ongoing, not an occasional special event. Twenty years ago, the Mayor attended CEPG meetings at least annually. Our local Councillor attended most meetings and was indeed responsible for setting up CEPG. Now we have no representative and no contact and no mutual Consultation.

Please, think long term. Do not pass this item in its current form. The consequences would be depressingly repetitive and ultimately very costly. Think IAP2. The model is there. Just use it!