

No expense spared for councils

EXCLUSIVE

YONI BASHAN

IT'S a figure that will delight an army of bureaucrats and horrify ratepayers — it costs \$1.7 billion a year to run NSW councils.

And that is before they spend a cent on road maintenance, footpaths and rubbish collection. Instead that is the bill for such necessities as interstate travel, overseas study tours, conferences and policy meetings.

To put it into perspective, the administration cost of NSW's councils dwarfs the amount spent on the Australian Federal Police, equals the Department of Agriculture and humbles the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Figures released to The Sunday Telegraph reveal the true costs of running council is \$1.7 billion for the 2014-15 financial year, which equates to about \$5 million a day.

By comparison, the AFP's budget for the same period was \$1.4 billion. The Department of Agriculture was given \$1.7 billion while the National Health and Medical Research Council got \$949 million.

NSW Local Government Minister Paul Toole said the spending was excessive and a product of waste and mismanagement. He said the figures were an argument in favour of the government's case for amalgamating some councils.

"Some councils are misleading the community, saying the sky is going to fall in if councils merge," Mr

ESSENTIAL EXPENSES

TOTAL GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION	
City of Sydney	\$118.9m
Blacktown	\$62.55m
Bankstown	\$44.5m
Newcastle	\$42.01m
Fairfield	\$33.44m

MAYORAL AND COUNCILLOR FEES	
City of Sydney	\$558,633
Blacktown	\$505,000
Parramatta	\$482,000
Penrith	\$481,000
Wollongong	\$458,000

INTERSTATE TRAVEL	
Orange	\$215,160
Shoalhaven	\$189,766
Blacktown	\$68,925
Dubbo	\$68,143
Lake Macquarie	\$43,933

COUNCILLOR EXPENSES	
City of Sydney	\$602,751
Blacktown	\$413,000
Auburn	\$293,000
Shoalhaven	\$256,000
Rockdale	\$254,000

GENERAL MANAGER REMUNERATION	
Parramatta	\$494,763
City of Sydney	\$452,098
Wyong	\$423,093
Warrimah	\$421,215
Randwick	\$403,878

CONFERENCE EXPENSES	
Gwydir	\$168,762
Hills Shire	\$64,585
Hay Shire	\$63,116
Liverpool	\$59,280
Parramatta	\$54,051

OVERSEAS EXPENSES	
Liverpool	\$47,707
Penrith	\$33,721
Port Macquarie-Hastings	\$26,048
Gosford	\$21,990
Newcastle	\$21,297

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Toole said, adding that the real reason those councils opposed amalgamations was because of "fees, expenses and salaries".

"They are more interested in their own perks rather than doing what is right for the community," he said.

Councillor expenses, which included legal costs, insurance and mobile phones, internet and landlines, were highest at City of Sydney, where \$602,751 was spent.

City of Sydney was also calculated

as having the highest mayoral and councillor fees — \$558,000. Overseas travel expenses were highest at Liverpool, Penrith and Port Macquarie, where \$47,707, \$33,721, and \$26,048 was spent respectively.

Liverpool Mayor Ned Mannoun defended the high costs of travel at his council. He said that he paid for his own airfares during a recent study tour of the United States.

"We have a huge area of Sydney where there's billions of dollars of in-

vestment and infrastructure, so we are very proactive and engaged, hence our travel costs are high," Mr Mannoun said.

The figures provided also included the total costs for conference expenses spent by each council, interstate travel, and salaries for general managers.

Mr Toole said he was dubious of the cumulative amounts spent by councils and ratepayers should feel the same.

"Ratepayers would rightly ask what they are getting for the \$1.7 billion NSW councils spend on administration and bureaucracy," he said.

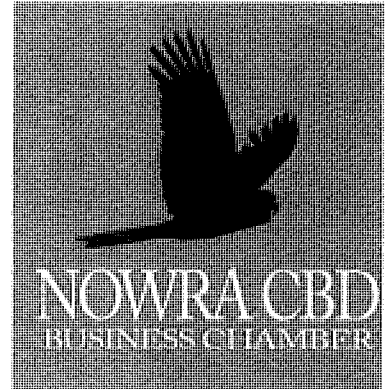
A spokeswoman for City of Sydney said the costs were appropriate given the size of its operations, which included a 24-hour customer service centre and various IT, financial and project management departments. Fees and expenses were also set by the Local Government Review Tribunal, she said.

Shoalhaven City Council

Received

MAYORAL

- 9 MAR 2016

File No. 5024ZEReferred to: CLF1st March 2016

Mayor and General Manager
Shoalhaven City Council
PO Box 42
Nowra NSW 2541

Dear Jo & Russ,

RE: MEMBERSHIP OF THE NOWRA CBD REVITALISATION COMMITTEE

As discussed with you recently we decided to seek incorporation of our Nowra CBD Tenants and Ratepayers Association and form the Nowra CBD Business Chamber Inc. As part of the NSW Department of Fair Trading requirements for incorporation we were asked to seek approval from the NSW Business Chamber for the use of the words Business Chamber in the name. After a detailed review the NSW Business Chamber granted its approval and the incorporated body finally came into existence. We must acknowledge the role played by our local State Members, Mrs. Shelley Hancock, for her suggestion to follow this path and her invaluable support through the process.

Now that the Chamber is up and running our members have recommended that I write to you to seek a position, as Chairman of the Chamber, on the above committee. It is noted that the Shoalhaven Business Chamber's President is a long standing member. Additionally it is also noted that a key member, Mr. Grant Gleeson, of the committee is retiring from it and that this creates an opportune vacancy for our request.

In putting this request for membership to Council I do so as a founding member of the originating group interested in improving our CBD, namely the CBD Action group which was established by Council in early 2012. Following the 2012 Local Government elections Council changed CBD Action into the Nowra CBD Committee and I served on this committee up to recently when the Revitalisation Committee was created. When the meetings were held I had a 90% attendance rate showing my genuine interest in the committee. I therefore have a long history in working with Council for the betterment of our CBD. I also, through my position as head of Ray White, Nowra bring a great deal of practical experience to the process.

I believe that the Revitalisation Committee is working well and with the appropriate funding and other support will continue to act as a focal point to ensure that the Nowra CBD meets the expectations of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan in making it the commercial hub of our City. As a member of the Council's Revitalisation Committee I also believe I can uniquely contribute to its activities.

I trust that you will look favourably on this request and provide me with the opportunity of joining the Revitalisation Committee.

Yours sincerely

Scott Baxter
Chairman | Nowra CBD Business Chamber

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