



MEDIA RELEASE

Mining affected councils to build strategic plan

Since inception in 1978 in Wollongong, the Association of Mining Related Councils (AMRC) has primarily been a lobby organisation, representing the interest of mining related regional councils in NSW. Now, it plans to map out how it will deliver more for its members, with a new strategic plan. The AMRC held its quarterly meeting in Wollongong last week. Chair, Col Mitchell (Mayor of Wollondilly Shire Council) said with 32 delegates, the strong attendance was indicative of the ever growing concerns, as member councils struggle to fund and address the impacts of mining.

Wollongong City Council's Lord Mayor, Cr Gordon Bradbery OAM, attributed the meeting's attendance to the host city's appeal as a destination and as a multicultural industrial city that is historically and financially underpinned by mining.

The Association currently comprises 22 councils, representing 19 percent of the land in NSW and 11 percent of the population. They represent a disproportionate amount of the economy and Government revenue, through mining royalties. The campaign to see more funds from those royalties flow back to the regions where mining occurs is ongoing. The State's mining sector is still expanding, with around 30 coal projects or mine extensions now under development. Related cost burdens for Local Government are increasing, while councils face rising operating costs and restricted revenue raising capacity.

A motion from the Chair to develop a strategic plan for the next four years was passed unanimously. "We haven't had a strategic plan before and I think it is most important, so we can work out where we're going and what we're all about. Having a plan for the outcomes we are after will help us to achieve them," Mayor Mitchell said.

Gloucester Shire Mayor, Cr Frank Hooke moved that a manual be developed to assist member councils in negotiating agreements with mining companies. This was debated at length and it was eventually decided that a means for information sharing would be considered during the day-long Strategic Planning Workshop, to take place the day before the next AMRC meeting in Scone on 10 May. "This is a way that the Association can be an important resource to member councils throughout NSW, from Gunnedah and Narrabri to Wollongong and Wollondilly, the Hunter to Broken Hill," Mayor Mitchell said.

Whether they be for or against the practice which now involves around 100,000 workers nationally, Fly-In Fly-Out issues are of considerable interest to AMRC members. Chair, Col Mitchell and Executive Officer, Don Tydd will attend the "Making FIFO Work in Regional Communities" conference in Rockhampton on 25 and 26 March to learn more. Independent Member for New England and Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, Tony Windsor, will address this top level conference on the recent Inquiry findings on FIFO workforce practices in regional Australia.

The AMRC meeting followed tours of Energy Australia's Tallawarra natural gas power station and the Port Kembla Coal Terminal and featured a presentation by two executives from the MAC Group, Australia's largest workforce accommodation provider.

Gunnedah Shire Mayor, Cr. Owen Hasler said his Council remains opposed to FIFO. "Gunnedah's priority will continue to be to encourage people who want to work in our area to also live in our area," he said.

Support was expressed for the Warrumbungle Shire Council (WSC), a dedicated member of the AMRC, as it facilitates its community's recovery from the devastating January bushfire. Around 54,000 hectares were burnt out near Coonabarabran, 53 families lost their home, countless animals (native and livestock) were killed and locals are now haunted by a stark, charred landscape. Although, many Councils have already contributed to the Warrumbungle Mayor's Bushfire Appeal Fund, the AMRC unanimously voted to donate \$7,000. The Appeal has raised around half a million dollars, to date.

WSC Mayor, Cr Peter Shinton said seeing the horror on people's faces who had lost their home or watching animals die had taken an emotional toll. "The AMRC donation was a touching surprise. Support from all over has meant a great deal to locals. It was humbling to have my peers recognise what we've been through and how we've been managing the crisis."

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Captions:

- Delegates of the Association of Mining Related Councils, during their tour of the Tallawarra natural gas power station.
- Wollongong City Council's Lord Mayor, Cr Gordon Bradbery OAM; AMRC Chair, Wollondilly Shire Council Mayor, Cr. Col Mitchell and Executive Officer, Don Tydd at the conclusion of the recent meeting.