

23. ECO-INFO – DEALING WITH COUNCIL ON HEALTH & BUILDING MATTERS

Edited 20/12/01

THE ROLE OF COUNCIL EMPLOYEES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Council employs staff, including *Environmental Health Officers, Development Planners or Building Inspectors*, who do an important job for the community. They carry out the following functions:

- Assess applications for the construction of buildings, and for development proposals.
- Conduct building inspections to ensure that building construction complies with approvals and standards, such as fire safety.
- Perform health inspections to help protect the public health of the community.
- Educate businesses about the latest health standards, such as infection control.

YOUR DEALINGS WITH COUNCIL STAFF

If you are building or developing a property, or run a business, at some stage this will involve contact with Wyong Shire Council and with Council staff.

All Council employees are public officials. This means that they work for the community's best interest. Council staff act according to professional standards and within Council's code of conduct.

This requires them to act honestly and impartially when performing inspections. They need your support to help them do so.

The public should be aware that:

- While they carry out official functions, staff work for Council - not for you. Council is responsible for regulating development, health and building standards for all the community.
- It is not necessary for members of the public to offer Council staff money, tips or gifts (including thank you gifts) in order to obtain a favourable inspection or outcome.

- Council sets all fees and charges associated with development applications and inspections, and collect the money. As a result, staff (except cashiers at Council's service counters) have been instructed not to handle cash or collect money, so you should not offer them payments.
- Council does not tolerate corruption. All Council employees must report any suspected corruption, such as bribery. Bribery includes paying or receiving money for benefits or favours. The penalties for anyone being caught bribing another person are severe and can lead to gaol sentences.
- Council seeks to deal with all applications and inspections professionally, honestly and impartially. All staff work to these standards and cannot make decisions based on personal friendships or social contacts. This could lead to partial decision-making and conflicts of interest.

MAKING PAYMENTS TO COUNCIL

- Council will inform you of any fees payable.
- Council issues invoices on official letterhead, and issues official receipts for all payments it collects.
- The only ways you should pay money for Council services are: at a Council office, by mail to a Council business address, or through other approved payment methods, including via Australia Post, over the phone, or via approved financial institutions.

TALKING TO COUNCIL

If you have any questions, or if there are any problems regarding applications and inspections, you should raise them in writing first with the Council officer(s) who is dealing with your matter. If the situation cannot be clarified for you, or if the problems remain, you should then contact the Director of Health and Development on 4350 5400 or the Manager of Development Services on 4350 5509.

If you have a complaint about the manner in which your application, inspection or building

matter has been handled, you should direct your complaint to the Public Officer or write to the General Manager. You could also consider contacting one of the Councillors who may make personal representations on your behalf.

It is important that any complaint you wish to make should be formally raised in the first instance directly with the Council. Your complaint will be properly reviewed and responded to within a reasonable time.

While Council staff will review issues raised and seek to resolve them, this does not always lead to resolution as the complainant would like. In such cases, the complainant should receive a clear explanation of the measures taken and the reasons why.

If you are still unhappy with the handling of your complaint, you may consider contacting the following organisations for advice on:

- Council procedures - Department of Local Government: Investigations and Review Branch, Ph (02) 9793 0645
- Potential corruption - Independent Commission Against Corruption: Ph (02) 9318 5999

If your complaint relates to the approval or otherwise of your application, you may also have appeal rights through Council, or if need be, in the Land and Environment Court, and you should seek independent advice in such a circumstance.