

We The People

Program 84

More Tweed Tremors



Some time ago I ran series of narratives called the Tweed Wars which provided insight and opinion into the gyrations of the Tweed Shire Council and the area in general. It seemed to me that the Tweed was at war with itself and lacked cohesion as a community from a number of viewpoints. Tweed Council, based in Murwillumbah and within range of 4CRB's signal is a key area in NSW and important to the Gold Coast too. They have numerous problems including social, environmental and restricted commercial opportunities and a somewhat dysfunctional Council. They also have the full spectrum of people as does the Gold Coast from nutters to decent folk who have their fellow citizens in mind along with the hope of a bright future for the area which sadly, is unlikely.

Local government in Australia is not a democratic level of government as it's not recognised in the Constitution and nor should it be as the last thing we need is more complexity. Australia needs less bureaucracy and not more but that's another story for another day. The reason local government is known as non democratic refers to the fact that it's only there at the pleasure of the state government and can be dismissed at any time by the Minister. In 2005 Tweed Council was dismissed and an Administrator appointed. Some argue it was long overdue and now it seems history may be repeating itself. The relatively new General Manager David Keenan was recently unceremoniously dismissed from his office and sent packing but at the time no one knew why except a small handful from the inner sanctum. Some Councilors were not even aware it was about to occur and the vote called for as a late item on the agenda. Apparently there was little information provided at the Council meeting regarding his sacking and the motion was barley carried. In the Tweed it appears you don't need orthodox logic or even natural justice and you certainly don't explain your actions or tell the public what's going on. So much for democracy and it's left the ratepayers puzzled and confused. Because an action is technically legal doesn't mean it's morally correct or ethically rested.

What on earth are they doing down there and what kind of part time Council feels it doesn't have to explain its actions at the time such a decision is made to dismiss their General Manager. They have sworn to serve the people yet the Council of the Tweed appears to take no council from their constituents, business or the environmental elders. Leadership seems to be misunderstood and in this country leadership should set an inclusive vision with the people. Now on the Gold Coast we pay our Councilors handsomely around \$130,000 a year but in the Tweed they receive only around \$16,000. If you pay peanuts you receive accordingly and it seems imperative that the Tweed should attract more competent people by paying their Councilors to be full time and hold them professionally and ethically accountable. This is harder to do when you pay them out of petty cash and that means they can't devote the time needed to do the job regardless of their suitability or intellect. In the case of the enormous package we pay our Gold Coast councilors you be the judge as to whether you think we get value because in most cases I don't and our councilors certainly don't like criticism or being asked to explain their actions.

Now I know the Tweed rate payers are very angry at this latest somewhat incomprehensible Council decision and they have every right to be. Once the reason for Keenan's dismissal was dragged out of Council as apparently they believe he wasn't a team player, it still begs the question as to who or what enclave decided that and when and on what base. In my view Mr. Keenan has been denied natural justice because of the clandestine nature of his dismissal and he is a public figure. In the mean time it always comes back to we the people in a democracy so I encourage Tweedundians to be vocal and call for transparency from a Council clearly out of its depth and embroiled in conflict and double standards on a fairly regular basis. **Until next time this is Kent Bayley**