

Media Release

Country Mayors Association Inc of NEW SOUTH WALES



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Is there a future for Local Government in NSW?

Mayors and Councillors from across Regional NSW have been accused of being incompetent and not worthy of the money they are paid to serve their communities in a recent speech delivered by new Local Government Minister Ron Hoenig during question time in State Parliament on Tuesday.

This iron-fisted approach has many wondering: Is there a future for local government in NSW?

Serving as an elected member of a regional community is both a challenging and rewarding task, but it is in no way financially lucrative.

Councillors stand up for their communities because they have a passion for the communities they live in. They want a future full of opportunity for the youth of their communities, and they want their communities' dreams and aspirations to come true.

That is why they serve in Local Government.

Mayor of Narromine Shire Council, Cr Craig Davies said: "Since the State election on March 25th, I've made it my business to meet with many new Ministers and highlight the challenges that rural Mayors face on a regular basis. I have been received warmly and listened to intently.

"I have formed a very positive view of all of them. But to hear the rant of Minister Hoenig is to listen to the voice of arrogance.

"My annual stipend for working an average of 50-60 hours per week is \$37,000. Minister Hoenig is paid \$315,000 p.a. and he has the hide to deny Mayors a fair and reasonable stipend when our Queensland counterparts are paid \$108,000. He's unworthy of his very privileged position and will damage this government and relations between Local Government and the Ministers. What a shame."

Mayor of Tamworth Regional Council Cr Russell Webb said: "It is a great disappointment that our new Minister for Local Government, a past mayor with a long and distinguished career, has attacked Local Government in the way he has.

"In doing so, he has criticised councils for spending money on building international relationships with sister cities that build on trade and tourism opportunities. These are activities that are normally supported by both Federal and State governments."

There are many factors that have contributed to the current financial stress in Local Government. The least of them is incompetence by those who serve. Some of the most significant factors are cost shifting from the State to Local Government by successive governments over many years, including:

- an out-of-touch annual rate review system that does not keep pace with inflation and cost of living increases
- a need for many regional councils to provide for services that would normally be provided by State or Federal governments, like child care, aged care, accommodation for police, nurses, ambulance, emergency services
- out-of-control cost increases in annual audit costs for many
- end-of-term election costs are becoming out of reach for many rural councils
- all funding programs are on hold by the new State Government.

The 2021 NSW Local Government elections resulted in a high number of Councils that did not receive adequate nominations to hold an election. Councillors aged between 60 and 69 make up the largest number serving in New South Wales, closely followed by 50 to 59 years of age.

“This cannot change without respect, recognition and collaboration by the State Government,” CMA Chairman Jamie Chaffey said.

“Minister Hoenig’s outburst against local government elected members in NSW has left us all feeling frightened for the future of Local Government in NSW.

“The CMA stands firm in our pursuit of equity of service provision for the residents of our communities. We stand united with our members to advocate for residents who choose to call Regional NSW home. We will continue to work with both State and Commonwealth governments to achieve the best quality of life and provision of services for our residents, and we look forward to a prosperous future.

“And on behalf of the CMA executive, I have a simple message for our members - you are appreciated, and you do deserve respect for serving your community, despite the recent attack to your credibility from the new Local Government Minister. Keep standing up for your community and use your voice with pride.”

For further information, contact

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