

Hunter Councils

Sharing resources and expertise in one of
Australia's most diverse and dynamic
regions

Roger Stephan

CEO Hunter Councils

Who we are

Hunter Councils, as a regional organisation of Local Government authorities, has been in existence for over 50 years.

Formerly entitled “Hunter Regional Organisation of Councils” (HROC) the organisation now comprises an incorporated Association - Hunter Councils Inc - and a wholly owned trading company, Hunter Councils Ltd.

Who we are

Hunter Councils works with eleven member Councils who collectively represent a community of 660,000.

Our member councils are:

Dungog, Cessnock, Gloucester, Great Lakes, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Singleton and Upper Hunter.

We also partner with the Central Coast Councils and Greater Taree on environmental and other programs and with 50 councils on purchasing.

Who we are



Some history

In the early 1990s the then members of HROC reviewed their regional organisation of Councils and adopted the ILAC (Integrated Local Area Council) model as its approach to its business operations.

Some history

Essentially this model is based on a philosophy that any services undertaken by Local Government have a “natural catchment” defined by efficiency and effectiveness that will not necessarily align with traditional Local Government Authority boundaries.

Some activities such as environmental services (air quality, water quality, etc,) have regional and sub-regional scope whereas road maintenance – most particularly of Council owned roads - is best managed within intra-Local Government area catchments defined by ownership, travel time and direct budgetary allocations.

Some history continued...

Arising from this the Association members endorsed an approach where Hunter Councils Inc (as it became known) would be a broker enabling any member to participate, or not participate, in the regional delivery of services.

Concurrently with the above the members reviewed and endorsed the roles of their Board, General Managers Advisory Committee (GMAC) and professional groups. At that time Hunter Councils Inc engaged its first full-time CEO. In the years following the governance structure thus established was successful in building the organisation, reducing the quantum of member contributions and expanding the range of regional services provided on behalf of members. The model now in place is widely regarded as both the most effective regional structure for local government in New South Wales and a model for such cooperation on a national level.

Our Mission

- To focus and foster cooperation, information and resource sharing
- To improve the image of the Hunter Region and of Local Government
- To effectively advocate on agreed regional positions and priorities
- To improve the quality of life and life opportunities for the people of the Hunter Region

Our Structure

Business Operations

- Environment Division
- Local Government Training Institute
- Regional Procurement
- Hunter Records Storage
- Screen Hunter Central Coast
- Strategic Consultancy Services
- Data Management Centre (in investigation)

Professional Team Coordination

Local Government Advocacy & Representation

The Environment Division



The Environment Division

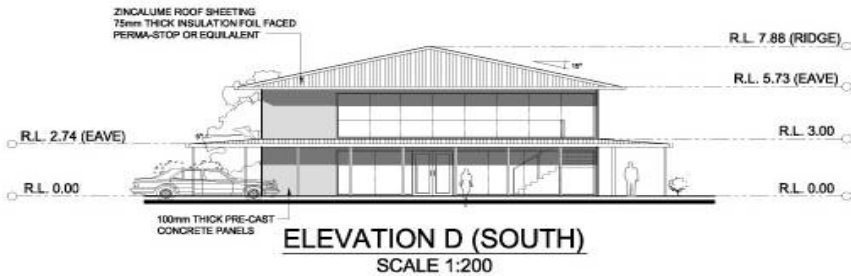
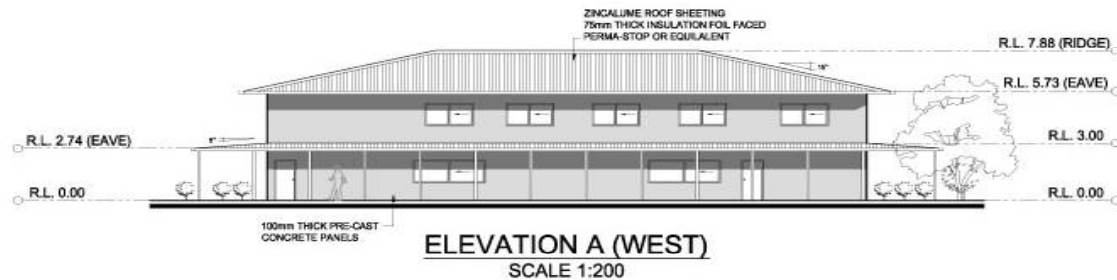
Designs and delivers regional environmental management programs and initiatives throughout the Hunter, Central Coast (Gosford and Wyong) and Mid-North Coast (Greater Taree).

Focus areas include climate change, sustainability, coastal and marine issues, biodiversity conservation, urban water cycle, catchment management and weeds management.

Capacity building, resource sharing and whole of government approaches are priorities.

The Environment Division is currently managing state and federal government program funding of approximately \$5 million.

The LGTI



Hunter Councils

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<p>2. CLIENT COMMENTS</p>				<p>K.C. K.C. 16.02.01</p>		<p>Project Approval: G.R. CRAIG B.L. MIE (Aust) CP(Eng) Consulting Civil Engineer</p>		<p>1 HARTLEY DRIVE THORNTON 2322 PO BOX 2153 GREENHILLS</p>		<p>Drawing No: 04</p>		<p>Revision: 2</p>			
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<p>Amendment Description Drawn App'd Date</p>															

The LGTI

The Local Government Training Institute is a registered training organisation providing cost effective training courses primarily targeted at local government but with expanding profile in the private sector. Training is conducted at our newly constructed facilities in Thornton, on site or throughout Australia. Training is shortly to expand to Fiji and potentially other Pacific island nations.

In 2009 over 7,000 individuals participated in training conducted by the Institute. Calendar year 2010 will see this rise to over 8,000.

Focus areas include:

- Statutory compliance training (WorkCover, RTA, OH&S etc)
- Nationally accredited traineeships in local government, the public sector, frontline management and business
- Specialty town planning, rating, regulatory services, records administration

Regional Procurement



Regional Procurement

Regional Procurement was formed to assist local government achieve economies of scale benefits and reduced administration costs for its members.

Regional Procurement currently has 50 members from seven regional organisations of councils based throughout metropolitan and country New South Wales. Tenders managed through the initiative are diverse, and have included signage, bulk chemicals, small plant, tyres, bulk fuel, bitumen emulsion and much more.

Hunter Records Storage



Hunter Records Storage

Hunter Records Storage operates a state of the art records repository at Thornton that provides its local and state government clients and private sector customers with 24 hours, 7 days per week access to their records details via the internet, customised billing, invoicing, and reporting.

Hunter Records Storage currently manages over 110,000 boxes of client files. Its services include:

- Records boxing, storage and retrieval
- Cataloguing, indexing and scanning
- Fax transmission
- Photocopying
- Secure disposal

Screen Hunter Central Coast



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2 spectacular regions, 1 stop shop

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Screen Hunter Central Coast

Screen Hunter Central Coast markets the regions as filming destinations and is a one-stop-shop for filming approvals, location scouting assistance, sourcing of local crew and services and support.

In the last 12 months SHCC has facilitated the processing of over 500 permits for stills, television and movie productions within the Hunter and Central Coast regions. The local spend involved in screen related activity in the same 12 months is estimated at over \$15 million.

Consultancy Services

This is the newest business activity of Hunter Councils, and comprises the provision of strategic consultancy services such as business planning, community engagement strategy, media strategy and training, general meeting facilitation and economic and tourism development initiatives.

Services are provided free to Hunter Councils members, at a discount to other local government entities and at cost to the private sector.

Professional Teams

The professional teams bring together specialists from Councils throughout our region to share professional insights, support and resources and to encourage region wide high professional standards.

Teams include, but are not limited to:

- LEP Group
- GIS Group
- Customer Service Team
- Internal Audit
- Risk Management
- Community Development
- Human Resources and Training
- OH&S
- Information Hunter
- Hunter Records Team



Last, but not least.....



Our Board and Regional Advocacy

The Board of Hunter Councils comprises the Mayors of each of the Local Government Areas of the Hunter. Supported by their General Mangers, the Board meet six times a year to oversee development and implementation of a Hunter Councils “strategic directions and priorities” agenda / statement as well as to form and articulate policy responses to issues impacting on our local communities, economy and environment.

The Board has three strategic policy groups to help inform the development and progress of this agenda. These groups - Environment, Economic Development and Infrastructure, Community and Cultural –meet five times a year between Board meetings and are comprised of one councillor (not the Mayor) per group nominated by each member council. The groups are supported in their investigations by the staff of Hunter Councils.

What's it all cost?

2004/2005: **\$643,673**

Comprised operational subsidy to Hunter Councils from eleven councils plus contribution to Environment Division programs.

Projected 2010/2011: **\$286,570**

Comprised almost entirely of contribution to Environmental programs.

Note that Consultancy Services and Screen Hunter Central Coast were not operating in 2004/2005.

Where to from here?

The pressure for efficiency / amalgamation remains strong – witness recent campaigns in metropolitan Sydney and the Hunter.

Local government needs to continue proactively exploring all opportunities to provide strategically important services in a viable way.

An option must always be openness to change. If amalgamation makes sense (the positives outweigh the negatives) then it should be pursued.

If amalgamation doesn't make sense / the local community doesn't want it is there another way to achieve similar outcomes?

Some of the issues

- Total income lost due to 2.6% rate cap rather than 3.5%. We note the disparity in value between the Construction cost index and the rate cap
- The swallowing up of rate cap rise by salary increases. The cumulative consequence of which is to restrict capacity to maintain services
- The limited capacity to make up shortfall in funding from other sources (e.g. user pays)
- The increase in rates for State Charges/Services
- The cost and nature of 'cost shifted' services
- Imposition of the waste levy
- Rates as a % of household income versus other household costs (put rates into perspective)
- Superannuation cost increases
- The absence of the IPART review recommendation and the absence of the Cost Index
- The long term consequences on the capacity of Councils to maintain employee numbers noting that Local Government is the dominant employer in many communities.

What do communities really want?

What do really want for their area and what is the local councils role?

Community surveys: Sense of belonging, of local autonomy and of influence on destiny. A sense of there being a local “future”. Access to services and facilities, healthy environment, employment both now and for children. Safety / law and order. Infrastructure that works.

Communities don't typically ask for effective corporate services or a good human resources strategy.

Maybe therein lies an answer.

Council specialisation

A process:

1. Stripping away “What we’ve always done / would like to do” and finding out what we have to do
2. Looking at the tasks that help us do our job (the enabling strategies) and determining the “natural catchment” of those tasks
3. Looking at the tasks that help us do our job (the enabling strategies) and determining what we are good at
4. Discussing with adjoining Councils with a natural linkage with our area and “sharing the load”.