

Community panel report

Thirty-one citizens look into the future



COMMENT
SIMON RICHARDSON
Mayor

LOCAL governments are not normally risk-taking Evel Knievels, but when Byron Shire Council teamed up with the not-for-profit research organisation newDemocracy Foundation in January this year, we decided to take a leap over the decision-making Grand Canyon to see what a citizens jury model would look like in this shire.

NewDemocracy ran the process independently of council, giving the process authenticity. We decided to call our 'jury' the Community Solutions Panel and its job was to answer the question: 'What infrastructure spending should we prioritise, and how should we fund these priorities if the rates alone are not enough?'

This month the panel came back to councillors and staff with their report and

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spoke to us directly about their findings and their experience.

The fact they gave up so much of their time for this project is indicative of what is great about this region.

I know what tough gigs our staff and councillors have, but it was great to hear members acknowledging the difficult job staff and councillors have in responding to, and providing for, the needs of our residents and the environment.

Panellists told us they spent many hours discuss-

ing the infrastructure needs of the shire and came up with key values that will guide staff when they are making decisions about infrastructure.

These values include safety, community well-being, connectivity, equity, environmental consciousness and design excellence.

They said 'safety and risk' should be our greatest consideration.

You can find the panel's report to council on our website or phone 6626 7000.

Staff will now use the panel's report to guide how we manage work on our infrastructure assets, with safety and risk to be the first priority in our assessment process, and councillors will adopt these recommendations as committed to prior to the panel's formation.

Thanks to everyone who put their hands up to be on the Community Solutions Panel and especially to the 31 committed souls who were selected.

It was an incredibly refreshing and positive project and it's given us a taste of how we can involve the community more in our decision-making process.