



MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL

Held on

Wednesday 20 May 2025

11:00 am

In

NEWA Meeting Room 2/129 Rusden Street Armidale

Present: - Interim Administrator – John Rayner (Chair)

Acting General Manager – Renee Irvine

**MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF NEW ENGLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD IN COUNCIL'S RUSDEN STREET OFFICE ON 20 MAY 2025**

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

The Chair advises that due to a technical issue the meeting is not being live-streamed and a video will not be available.

PRESENT: Interim Administrator – John Rayner
Acting General Manager – Renee Irvine

APOLOGIES: N/A

DECLARATION OF INTEREST: N/A

MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING 16 APRIL 2025

The minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the New England County Council held on the 16th of April 2025 are taken as a true and accurate record.

Moved – Interim Administrator John Rayner

Carried

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE NEW
ENGLAND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON 16 APRIL 2025**

None

INTERIM ADMINISTRATORS MINUTE MAY 2025

- **Proposal to Dissolve New England County Council**

As previously reported to Council, through July 2024 each of the constituent Councils resolved unanimously that the NECC be dissolved. In October 2024 each Council resolved to submit a proposal under Sec 383 (1) of the Local Government Act to the Minister for Local Government to dissolve the NECC and transfer the responsibilities under the NSW Biosecurity Act to the constituent Councils.

The decisions taken by each Council were unanimous.

On 12th December 2024 Armidale Regional Council submitted a formal Proposal to the Minister under Section 383(1) of the Local Government Act to dissolve the New England County Council.

The Proposal has been advertised by the Minister and it is expected that the Minister will take a decision over the coming weeks.

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If the Minister decides to proceed with the proposal to dissolve it will need to go to the Executive Council of Cabinet prior to seeking the Governor's approval of the necessary Proclamation.

The Council has been suspended until 17th June 2025 so it is now expected that if dissolution is to occur it will be close to that date.

RESOLVED 22/25

1. The report be received and noted.

Moved Interim Administrator - John Rayner

Carried

- **Sale of 21 Waller Avenue Armidale**

At the Council Meeting held on 16th April 2025, authority was delegated to the Interim Administrator "to negotiate a satisfactory acquisition of the property". Negotiations have been held with Armidale Regional Council which will become the owner of the property, subject to satisfactory provision being included in the 2025/26 Operational Plan/Budget. The agreement reached will result in the constituent Councils being reimbursed in full for their voluntary financial contributions which enabled the New England County Council to continue to operate. The price will also cover the legal, registration, agent's commission and other costs associated with the acquisition. A Deed of Agreement will be entered with the constituent Councils to cover the acquisition, payment, management of the property and the distribution of the income from the acquisition and the lease to Hillgrove Mining Pty Ltd.

RESOLVED 23/25

1. The report be received and noted

Moved Interim Administrator – John Rayner

Carried

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- **Finances**

Council has received a grant of \$452,991 (GST exclusive) under the Weed Action Program. Receipt of this grant will enable Council maintain its operations until dissolution, assuming this occurs in June 2025.

The grant is for the financial year 2024-25 however the proportion of the grant applicable to the period from dissolution to 30th June 2025 will need to be repaid to the funding authority. Subject to the date of dissolution this could be approximately \$20,000.

Constituent Councils which will take on the biodiversity responsibilities to 30th June may apply for the funds repaid.

The acquisition of 21 Waller Avenue by Armidale regional Council will mean that the constituent Councils will be reimbursed the \$1.6m voluntarily contributions advanced to enable NECC to continue to operate and meet its statutory obligations.

RESOLVED 24/25

1. The report should be received and noted.
2. The Minister for Agriculture be thanked for the Weed Action Program grant.

Moved Interim Administrator – John Rayner

Carried

- **2023-24 Weed Action Program**

Local Land Services has requested the return of unreported funds, \$72,558.50, under the 2023-24 Weed Action Program. The New

England County Council received approval for a Weeds Action Program Grant of \$437,491 for the financial year 2023/24. Of that amount, \$344,668 was provided to NECC, with the balance, \$92,823, being subject to the outcome of a forensic audit.

Council's records were totally inadequate in being able to support the certified claim for grant funding.

Following receipt of the grant and recognising the potential inaccuracies of the claim, the Acting General Manager and staff, in good faith, exhaustively examined base documents and called on recollections in an endeavour to justify the claim.

Due to the poor state of the financial records, (recognised by the Audit Office of NSW in its 2022-23 and 2023-24 Audits), it was not possible substantiate the original claim.

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Proper recognition of and accounting for expenditure funded by grant funds now occurs. The organisation has most recently adopted a focus which is in keeping with the standards the community and other stakeholders would expect.

A request has been submitted to Local Land Services to write off the amount requested to be returned.

RESOLVED 25/25

1. That the report be received and noted

Moved Interim Administrator – John Rayner

Carried

- **Acting General Manager**

Following the termination of the General Manager in July 2024, the Manager Finance and Administration, Renee Irvine was appointed Acting General Manager.

Considering her limited local government experience, Renee has performed in the role to my complete satisfaction. She has continued her previous role in addition to meeting her Acting General Manager responsibilities.

Renee, commenced the acting role after significant financial and governance issues had been identified. These were certainly not of her making.

The Audit Office as part of the closing report recognised the improvement in the Council's books and records since Renee took control of the Council's finances. Renee introduced strict controls on Council expenditure and ensured full documentation supported all payments made.

Renee has reestablished the reputation of Council and although the Council will be dissolved, she has formed good relations with the government departments Council works with. She has also brought integrity to the applications for and certification of expenditure of government grants.

The finances of NECC have been dire. Renee has been proactive in making savings, monitoring cash flows and disposing of assets that were not required.

I have been impressed with Renee's professionalism, integrity and work ethic.

Renee will be transferred to Armidale Regional Council which will benefit from her knowledge and experience.

I thank Renee for her assistance and wish her every success for the future.

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RESOLVED 26/25

1. That appreciation be expressed to Renee Irvine for the professional and efficient way she has undertaken her role as Acting General Manager.

Moved Interim Administrator – John Rayner

Carried

- **Investigation Under Section 430 of Local Government Act**

The Office of Local Government has advised that it is undertaking an investigation which will focus on aspects of Council's operations in regard to whether a former employee was paid in accordance with the employee's contract of employment.

The findings of the investigation will be reported to the Minister for Local Government and a copy provided to the Council.

RESOLVED 27/25

1. The report be received and noted.

Moved Interim Administrator – John Rayner

Carried

- **Acting General Manager.**

RESOLVED 28/25

1. That should the need arise the Interim Administrator be delegated authority to appoint an Acting General Manager

Moved Interim Administrator – John Rayner.

Carried

John Rayner

Interim Administrator

20th May 2025

MATTERS OF URGENCY – ANY OTHER BUSINESS – No Other Business

Next Meeting – Once Proclamation has been gazetted a meeting will be scheduled,

Meeting Closed :- 11:15am