

## Item 14.5 Review of Council Meeting Opening Format

**Reporting:** General Manager – Greg Alomes

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### **SUMMARY:**

This report proposes that Council consult with the community on options to amend the opening format of ordinary meetings of Council.

### **DISCUSSION:**

At a Councillor Workshop on 13 August 2020, consideration was given to the importance of the opening sections of the ordinary Council meetings and the messages communicated to the community, Councillors and staff.

All council meetings are governed by the *Local Government (Meeting Procedures) Regulations 2015*. However, the Regulations do not prevent a council from deciding how they wish to begin their meetings.

The standard agenda items of an ordinary King Island Council meeting include the following:

#### **1. Qualified Advice**

Notice of Meeting

General Manager's Certification

Statement of Council's vision, guiding principles and values

#### **2. Attendance and Apologies**

Councillors, staff, media and public

Opening Prayer

At the Councillor workshop, it was noted that the current Council had not reviewed the non-statutory elements of the opening format to determine whether they align with the values, obligations and commitments of current Councillors. Consequently, a Councillor Working Group was formed to review these sections and consider different options to acknowledge and encompass all Councillors' values, thoughts and opinions.

The Working Group identified a key theme of the opening format should be to respect the diversity of the King Island community and to promote inclusiveness of the wider community. Key messages to be declared at the start of each meeting should include Councillors':

- responsibilities as decisions makers;
- responsibilities as members of a Council group;
- obligations to the community and King Island; and
- legal and ethical responsibilities, especially in relation to the *Local Government Act 1993* and the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

The Working Group also recognised the appropriateness of including an acknowledgement to country.



### **Specific Options for Consideration:**

The Working Group considered a broad range of meeting opening options before developing the following for consideration by Council and the wider community.

The options are not mutually exclusive and any one or more could be included in a revised meeting opening format. It is also an option to maintain the status quo and not make any changes.

Option 1 An acknowledgement to country.

Opening meetings with an acknowledgment to country is a normal practice at many Commonwealth and State Government meetings. Many councils have also adopted the practice. A possible wording for a King Island Council statement is, as follows:

*“The King Island Council acknowledges and respects the palawa (pala-wa) people as the traditional and ongoing custodians of lutruwita (loo-tru-wee-ta). We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.” (provided by the Aboriginal Officer at State Growth)*

Option 2 Affirmation statement

The purpose of an affirmation is to highlight the responsibilities and obligations of Councillors before proceeding to perform their decision making roles in the course of the meeting. The following is an example of such a statement:

*“As we come together tonight to work for our community, we affirm that we will strive to bring about the very best outcomes for those whom we represent. We acknowledge the respect that we have for each other and for the people whose views and interest we serve; knowing that in a spirit of professionalism, selflessness and cooperation the best decisions will be made. We appreciate this opportunity to work together to serve our community.”*

Option 3 Individual statements by invited guests or councillors

Council currently invites representatives of the Island’s churches to open its meetings with a prayer. The churches are recognised in Council’s coat-of-arms and the invitation for representatives to speak provides a practical means to recognise Council’s linkages with, and role in, the community.

The current system operates on a rotational basis and could be extended to enable representatives of other groups and Councillors to make individual statements. The purpose would be to reinforce Council’s role in the community and the obligations and aspirations of Councillors to serve the best interests of the community. Examples could include:

- A what went well message
- A message of gratitude
- A relevant personal story or message



### **Community Consultation:**

The Working Group has proposed that the community be invited to comment on, and be engaged in the consideration of, these options before any changes are formally debated and decided by Council.

It is therefore proposed that the options be released for community comment and that the Working Group hold public meetings at which the options can be discussed.

A further report will then be prepared on community responses and final options for Council's consideration.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The Councillor Working Group established to review the opening sections of Council meetings has identified three options for consideration by the community before being formally considered by Council. The three options are:

1. To begin each ordinary council meetings with an acknowledgement to country;
2. Followed by an affirmation statement reflecting Council's core values; and/or
3. Finishing with a statement by an invited guest or Councillor, which could be a prayer or a gratitude message.

### **Recommendation:**

#### **That Council:**

- (a) Receive and note the report;**
- (b) Authorise the Councillor Working Group to consult and engage with the community on the three options noted in the report; and**
- (c) Request a further report on responses from the community and the Working Group's proposals for consideration at a future Council meeting.**

Moved Cr I Allan  
Cr V Philbey

#### That Council:

- a) Received and note the report;
- b) Authorise the Councillor Working Group to consult and engage with the community on the three options noted in the report; and
- c) Request a further report on responses from community and the Working Group's proposals for consideration at a future Council meeting.

**CARRIED unanimously**

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