

We're open here



FROM THE MAYOR TONY WELLINGTON

I CAN'T help but make the comparison between Noosa Council's approach to reporting and transparency and that which I experienced when I was a councillor on the regional Sunshine Coast Council.

When I was on the council, a great many issues were discussed and determined "in camera".

It began with the Agenda Review. This was the only preliminary meeting leading to the statutory monthly ordinary meeting. During the agenda review, councillors would ask questions about each item on the upcoming ordinary meeting agenda. But the entire agenda review was always held in a closed session, away from public gaze.

By comparison, on all of our Noosa committee meetings leading to the ordinary meeting are held in open, public sessions. On the council, not an ordinary meeting would go by without there being a swag of issues discussed in confidence. I recall one ordinary meeting when

there were 24 items on the agenda, of which 13 were held in confidential session. One of those matters was a progress report on "implementation of corporate and operational plans".

By contrast, updates on Noosa Council's progress are aired in our public agendas. Of course, this can lead to the information in such reports being twisted, but that is a small price to pay for the confidence that transparency overwhelmingly engenders.

It is very rare for a confidential matter to appear in a Noosa Council meeting agenda. The only time that we choose to deal with matters in confidence is when they are of a very specific legal nature, and the discussions could thus prejudice our legal position, or else where the matter is of undeniable commercial-in-confidence. We have discussed just three items in confidential session over the past 12 months.

The Crime and Corruption Commission's recent Operation Belcarra Report into local government notes that the four key principles of good governance are "equity, transparency, integrity and accountability." Accordingly, the word "transparency" appears on almost every one of its 162 pages.