

President's Report – February 2018

I would like to begin by thanking the Executive team of Tony Gibson, Melva Hobson and Charles Toms who have provided countless (and unpaid) hours to OSCAR. Without their efforts and advice OSCAR would not have made the progress it did in 2017.

Make no mistake, OSCAR has made tremendous ground since its “revival” in February of last year. The organisation is better known in the community and is gaining a reputation for balanced but forthright advocacy of our objectives. We have a long way to go to be the force in local government reform but we are certainly headed in the right direction.

I would like to particularly acknowledge Tony's role as Acting President in my absence last year. This could have been a straightforward role but for the minor distraction of a State election. Tony did a wonderful job of marshalling OSCAR's resources. The resulting Candidate survey and Candidate Forum were a great success and did a lot to enhance OSCAR's reputation in the broader community and among the coast's politicians. The lessons learnt from this experience will stand us in good stead in future Council and State elections.

I would also like to thank individual members who have taken on projects or tasks on behalf of OSCAR – thanks to Kathryn Hyman (Minutes Secretary), Peter Baulch (OSCAR Vision Statement) and Gillian Hall (Social media strategy). I would also like to acknowledge the advice I have received from Lyn Saxton, Narelle McCarthy, John Hare and Joanne Wright as I have come to terms with the responsibilities of the President's position. Any omissions or mistakes I have made, and there have been a few, remain my sole responsibility!

Special thanks to Susie Chapman who represented OSCAR so well on the MRECG.

In the time since our last AGM we have experienced both highs and lows.

We are certainly a stronger and more respected organisation than we were 12 months ago and our profile is much higher. We have established our credibility with the media and the SCRC to the extent that we are being asked to represent our members and the broader community at Council events (eg the Verge Parking Workshop), at presentations to Council (eg Sekisui House, along with a number of member organisations) and on Council committees (eg MRECG). We have never sought to be the sole representative of our members but rather we do our best to act in conjunction with them.

We have also established a good working relationship with the Noosa Council.

The MRECG process was a positive for us, even if we played a more background role than other organisations. We lobbied for the establishment of the MRECG, provided input on the implementation of the process and made an excellent contribution to the MRECG itself through Susie Chapman. The quality of our contribution has been noted by the Council who should be congratulated on the way they eventually implemented this community engagement exercise despite their clear preference back in January 2017 for a different solution for groyne replacement. Despite some hiccups the MRECG process resulted in a good outcome for the community and proved it is possible for win-win outcomes.

Our on-line presence is now well established and our website and Facebook page are beginning to gain significant traction and increasing readership. The website has the added advantage of providing a portal for all of OSCAR's resources and documents; this is a real value add for our members and allows us to be a low-cost organisation in terms of

administrative resources. I urge all members and supporters of OSCAR to regularly visit these sites; and of course contributions are always encouraged.

The OSCAR logo remains a weakness in our “corporate image” and anyone who would like to exercise their creative skills and come up with an alternative would be welcome.

We have attempted to keep the OSCAR membership informed of our activities through our regular email updates and appreciate the member organisations who share these with their own membership. At present these emails are modest in term of both content and aesthetics and it is hoped they might be improved in 2018. We would hope to emulate the very impressive newsletters produced by some of our member groups.

As previously mentioned, we played a positive role in the State election campaign despite the incredibly tight time frames we were faced with. The Candidate Forum was a success not only for the attendees but also for the many people who watched the video of the proceedings via Facebook after the event. The Candidate Survey was an excellent document that was well received by many of the State election candidates, particularly those who do understand that the State government does control the legislative context in which Local Government bodies operate. These experiences will help inform what we can and should do with the next Council elections which are only 765 days away from our AGM date!

The next council elections may seem a long way off but a significant component of our focus and strategy in 2018 must be preparing for 28 March 2020.

As you are all aware our membership covers both the Noosa and SC Regional Councils which present us with such a contrast! We regularly attend meetings of both Councils where we witness the open and accountable structure of the Noosa Council compared with the much less open operation of the SCRC.

The best illustration of this is the contrast between the numbers of closed sessions both councils have had since April 2016; to date 11 such sessions in Noosa and 133 in the SCRC. This cannot be explained away simplistically in terms of the relative size of the councils as has been suggested by the SCRC; it is true that the scale of projects is larger for the SCRC but the range and complexity of issues is similar.

The responses on this matter by the Council and individual Councillors (in justifying their personal voting actions on motions to go into closed sessions) are inadequate and OSCAR will keep pursuing this matter. There have been minor concessions that the SCRC Council has made in this area; ie Planning Scheme amendments such as those prior to Easter 2017 will be no longer held in closed session and the undertaking by the SCRC CEO to provide OSCAR, on request prior to each Council Meeting, with more detail on why agenda items are to be discussed in closed session. How this actually pans out is yet to be seen.

We also had success with both councils in terms of the availability of Councillors’ historic Registers of Interest which are now accessible on their respective websites.

2017 saw the implementation of the ECQ’s Electronic Disclosure System for political donations; this is a reform that OSCAR had lobbied hard for in the past. We will continue to monitor rules around disclosure in order to ensure this really provides the transparency that was intended.

The State Government appears to remain committed to reforms in relation to developer donations, conflict of interest issues and handling of councillor complaints that came out of

the CCC's Operation Belcarra Report and we will continue to press the Government to introduce this legislation as soon as possible.

Of course, we continue to battle, along with our member organisations, to defend the primacy of the Planning Schemes of both councils. This is an exercise that is much harder in the SCRC LGA where the Planning Scheme is under concerted attack from the development lobby and compliant Councillors.

OSCAR meetings have been well attended with between 10 and 18 member organisations present (15 on average). Congratulations to Coolum & North Shore Coast Care and Twin Waters West & Surrounds who attended every meeting.

Given the membership expressed a strong desire for the General Meeting to be the main decision making body for OSCAR, rather than following an Executive driven model, it is important that attendance at these meetings remains high.

In conclusion, thank you all for your contribution to OSCAR's successes in 2017. I look forward to us making further gains in good governance in 2018 and beyond.

Greg Smith

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

OSCAR President

22 February 2018