PUBLIC SUBMISSION: Submitted by ████████████████████

RE: DRAFT Public Forum Policy (Submissions close 4.30pm 29th Jan 2024)

WORDS FOR ONLINE SUBMISSION ONLY

OBJECTION: I object to the proposed Public Forum changes.

RECOMMENDATION: I recommend that if Council wishes to decrease access for Community members to address their elected Local Government Representatives that they do so more transparently and simply **remove the Public Forum opportunity altogether**. Atleast this will clearly demonstrate to community, just how willing and receptive Council is to hear from and work with Community Members. Which appears to me to be the underlying intention of the proposed changes to the policy at this point in time.

Points to consider:

- Timing of this display – This is an opportunity for Council to be proactive and for Council to consider and make a move to not put ANY items on Public Exhibition over the Christmas/New Year period. I understand this isn't common practice, but this doesn't mean that WSC couldn't lead by example and give consideration to this.

- Council might also consider the NUMBER of items that can be placed on exhibition at any one time? There have been 8 over this Christmas, New Year period, too many for me to attempt to review and consider, even though I like to and normally would.

- **ALL DRAFT policies** on display for community should be the **tracked changes version**, as Council receives in the Business Paper. Community should be able to clearly see the proposed changes and understand WHY they are being made.

- The copy of the DRAFT policy as displayed as a link on Council's website during the exhibition, did the document change throughout the exhibition?

- Have Councillors been provided with the statistics of Public Forum numbers in recent years, to provide evidence of how these proposed changes are warranted or necessary?
Having attended numerous Council meetings as an observer and presented to the Public Forum maybe 4-5 times in 15 years, **I would consider the actual Public Forum numbers (relative to the population) to be quite low and question the actual need to change the policy**, particularly the items changed and removed from Point 6. Policy Statement:
  - Removal of "A person may apply to speak to no more than three issues."
  - Change to "Each speaker will be allowed four minutes to address Council."

- Warrumbungle Shire Council: Criss-crossed by the Newell, Oxley, Castlereagh and Golden highways, Warrumbungle Shire spans an area of **12,380 square kilometres**. The Shire has a **total population of 9380** and this **encompasses the townships of Coonabarabran, Baradine, Binnaway, Mendooran, Coolah and Dunedoo**. *Source: RDA Orana*
  - While considering these facts about our region, do you consider that one opportunity a month, limited to four minutes might be disproportionate to the sheer scale and

number of communities and therefore potential issues or concerns for a community member to address their elected representatives. This is potentially the ONLY opportunity for a community member to do so. Limiting the amount of time TOTAL, is not giving consideration to the possibility that one community member may wear numerous community hats (as you would all know how much communities rely on volunteers and that many do)and potentially be travelling significantly to attend the Council meeting.

- In the tracked changes document, as viewed by Council in the business paper – please see **Point 9. Version Control**
I would like to bring to Councillors attention that what is documented as the "Review Date" in the adopted version, as September 2020 (Adopted 18 February 2021) … HAS NOW CHANGED TO "Next Review Date"
This is not shown in the tracked changes of this document. What other changes have been made to this policy and aren't being "shown" in tracked changes? This is not the way the tracked changes function works, to make changes to the document and for them to NOT BE SHOWN, means that the function was turned off when the changes were made.
While the version control table does show the version numbers and the adoption date, this point is around process, and transparency in process. **IF the policy is to change** to show the **"Next Review Date"** and NOT the **"Review Date"**, this should be clearly displayed in the tracked changes along with every other proposed change.
  - Another change not tracked in Council's copy, is the removal of the words "Part 4", from page 1 of the adopted policy
  - It is not my job as a community member to ensure that all changes are transparent to you as Councillors and to us, as community. This should be ensured by good process, good governance – as described in Council's Mission.

- **Point 2. Background** The changes to the first paragraph, while they don't essentially change the meaning or opportunity of the Public Forum, it does clearly indicate Council's priorities and intentions, to be more about "providing opportunity for Councillors" than by "providing opportunity for members of the community". Maybe the Policy name should be Council Forum Policy, if this is more an opportunity for Councillors than it is for the public? Language is important and can portray intentions and beliefs, I find the choice of this wording change interesting to say the least. I hope Councillors as our elected representatives share my concerns for this particular change and the apparent need to do so.

- My final point that I wish for Council to consider is dot point 4 also in **Point 2. Background** where it states that the Public Forum seeks to: **assist Council in meeting its Vision, Mission and Values by facilitating and encouraging an open and accessible organisation**
  - Please consider – **How does the proposed changes to this policy do this?**
  - Please see below (next page) the Vision, Mission and Values as screenshot from Council's website.

Vision

Excellence in Local Government **?**

Mission

We will provide:

- Quality, cost effective services that will enhance our community's lifestyle, environment, opportunity and prosperity

- Infrastructure and services which meet the social and economic needs and aspirations of the community now and in the future

- Effective leadership and good governance, by encouraging teamwork, through a dedicated responsible well trained workforce

Values

Honesty
Frank and open discussion, taking responsibility for our actions

Integrity
Behaving in accordance with our values

Fairness
Consideration of the facts and a commitment to two way communication

Compassion
Working for the benefit and care of our community and the natural environment

Respect
To ourselves, colleagues, the organisation and the community listening actively and responding truthfully

Transparency
Open and honest interactions with each other and our community

Passion
Achievement of activities with energy, enthusiasm and pride

Trust
Striving to be dependable, reliable and delivering outcomes in a spirit of goodwill

Opportunity
To be an enviable workplace creating pathways for staff development

Last Updated: 04 May 2016

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK ❯